



BRINGING OFF-TRACK YOUTH INTO THE CENTER OF HIGH SCHOOL REFORM

LESSONS AND TOOLS FROM LEADING COMMUNITIES

June 2009



This toolkit was prepared by **Jobs for the Future's** Connected by 25 team. Connected by 25 focuses on creating the systemic and policy changes necessary to develop and support effective models that prepare students who are not on track to graduation to complete high school and advance along pathways to postsecondary credentials.

This toolkit would not be possible without the vision and persistent efforts of the people and communities that have been the pioneers in this work. Many of the tools draw directly on materials developed in those front-runner cities. In the communities funded through the Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG) Strategic Assessment Initiative, we are indebted to:

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INTRODUCTION



JFF prepared this toolkit to support the efforts of leaders who recognize the imperative to improve outcomes and options for struggling students and dropouts.

Emerging data on low graduation and college-readiness rates pose serious challenges to, and open new opportunities for, urban school districts. In many districts across the country, 60 percent or fewer of the students who start in ninth grade graduate four years later (Swanson 2004, Edwards 2006). Nationally, only 45 percent of students who graduate from high school are prepared for college. For low-income students the rate is only 21 percent (Goldberger 2007).

Such data, whether gathered and reported by community advocates, by the state department of education, or by a school district, are creating a new imperative to accelerate the systemic reform of high schools. In embarking on high school reform, most districts begin with traditional school-improvement approaches such as new curricula, more effective instructional methods, and perhaps new and more rigorous graduation requirements. Some districts are combining these methods with more aggressive approaches, such as converting large high schools into smaller semi-autonomous or autonomous units with new leadership, as part of the creation of a choice-based portfolio of high schools.¹

Fueled by new research on the large number of young people who are out of school without a diploma and the even larger number who are still in high school yet not progressing toward a four- or even a five-year graduation, a handful of cities have added elements critical to their agenda for systemic high school reform: early-intervention strategies targeted to ninth graders who are starting to show warning signs—such as poor attendance or failing grades—of falling behind (are “off track”) and the development of an expanded set of options designed for young people who are significantly off track to graduation. These options include schools and programs that help young people who have become discouraged and disengaged to get back on the path to graduation and preparation for postsecondary learning and work.

The New York City Department of Education spearheaded this approach in 2004-2005 when its Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation, in conjunction with the Parthenon Group, identified and segmented the population of “over-age and under-credited” youth who were in school but not making progress to graduation and consequently most likely to drop out. In undertaking this study, the Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation and Parthenon focused on the 2003 cohort of students and then drew policy and programmatic directions from a careful study of this cohort. After defining the over-age and under-credited population as those who are two or more years off track to graduation, and segmenting this group by age and distance to graduation, New York City leaders determined which schools and programs were most successful at graduating these subpopulations and launched an aggressive effort to scale up these school options. They also determined what additional program designs were needed to adequately serve specific segments of the population.

¹Including, for example, Boston, Chicago, New York City, Oakland, and Portland, Oregon

In a similar vein, the Consortium on Chicago School Research, using data from the Chicago public schools, showed that an indicator that signals when ninth graders are falling seriously off the track to earning a diploma is 85 percent predictive of future dropouts. A student is considered on track at the end of ninth grade if he or she has earned at least five full-year course credits and no more than one F (as a semester mark) in a core academic course (Allensworth & Easton 2005). More recent research conducted by the consortium has shown that more than half of nongraduates can be identified as early as the end of the first semester of ninth grade, using either absences or course-failure rates, allowing schools to intervene earlier to get students back on track to a high school diploma (Allensworth & Easton 2007).

Looking at the Philadelphia public schools, Robert Balfanz and Ruth Neild at Johns Hopkins University and Liza Herzog at the Philadelphia Education Fund found that school-based factors—such as low attendance and poor grades as early as sixth grade—have value in predicting who will later drop out. Armed with these data, they and their partners at the Philadelphia Education Fund are working with middle schools to pilot research-based interventions (Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog 2007). These data analyses and emerging findings on the outcomes of specific interventions make it more possible than ever for states and districts to invest in the most promising practices and policies.

New York City's pioneering efforts, along with those of the consortium in Chicago and the Philadelphia researchers, have had a significant ripple effect across the country. Community and school leaders in many cities are now undertaking analyses to pinpoint with greater accuracy than ever which students will—without an intervention or new option—likely not graduate from high school in four years, if at all.² Based on a set of leading indicators of academic performance and school behavior, such predictions point to factors that school people can identify and address.

In 2005, a group of national and local foundations within the Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG), through an initiative staffed by Jobs for the Future, provided grants to five cities at the forefront of applying such knowledge and research to approaches to dropout prevention and recovery. In each of the cities—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Portland (OR), and San Jose—a partnership of community-based, civic, and school leaders formed to collaborate on four strategies:

- The collection and dissemination of data on the out-of-school and struggling student population;
- The development of an expanded set of options for struggling students who are not on track to graduate with their peers (for example, over-age and lacking significant credits for their grade);
- The design of a political strategy for removing policy barriers and creating new incentives to address the dropout crisis; and
- The mobilization of a growing group of constituents to act on improving outcomes and options for struggling and out-of-school youth.

²Including, for example, Brockton, MA; Des Moines, IA; Jacksonville, FL; Mobile, AL; Pittsburgh, PA

Bringing Off-Track Youth into the Center of High School Reform will serve as a “starter kit” for communities seeking to introduce a systemic approach to dropout prevention and recovery, and to bringing struggling and out-of-school youth closer to the center of high school reform.

Strong interest from community and school leaders in Las Vegas, Nevada, and Washington, DC, soon led these two communities to adopt a similar framework and set of goals. Since then, a growing number of other communities has shown interest in this framework and in learning from efforts in the pioneering communities. Cities across the country are sending teams to New York and other cities to learn from leaders there and to consider the expanded options they have developed. In 2007, the U.S. Department of Labor funded seven cities to undertake a planning and implementation process similar to that launched by the Youth Transition Funders Group, fueling even greater demand for lessons and tools from these cities.³

This toolkit, which draws extensively on the work of the frontrunners, is intended to support the efforts of leaders in cities across the country who recognize the imperative to improve outcomes and options for struggling students and dropouts. It can serve as a “starter kit” for such communities as they attempt a systemic approach to dropout prevention and recovery and to bringing struggling and out-of-school youth closer to the center of high school reform.

The toolkit is organized in three chapters, each of which focuses on decision points in identifying young people who are falling off track and on creating high-quality learning environments to help them reengage and go on to graduation.

Chapter 1: Improving Schools’ Capacity to Keep Students on Track

presents a set of tools designed to help educators implement strategies to prevent students from becoming discouraged, falling behind, and giving up on school by intervening quickly when they start to show signs of struggling.

Chapter 2: Expanding the Options

provides tools to help districts and their partners think through and offer new, academically challenging options needed to successfully reengage young people—in some cities, a large proportion of their population—who have given up on high school altogether or who are significantly off track. These tools will help leaders both to assess their capacity to start new schools and to determine the reentry mechanisms needed to enable out-of-school youth to take advantage of the opportunity to return.

Chapter 3: Improving and Supporting Options

offers tools to help community and school leaders consider key management and governance issues raised when an expanded set of options is formed, and provides strategies for assessing and improving the quality of schools serving off-track youth.

³The seven cities are funded through the U.S. Department of Labor’s Multiple Education Pathways Blueprint Initiative.

A young man with dark hair, wearing a blue and white plaid button-down shirt, is sitting at a desk in a classroom. He is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. In the background, other students are blurred, suggesting a busy classroom environment. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the man's features.

IMPROVING SCHOOLS' CAPACITY TO KEEP STUDENTS ON TRACK

photo courtesy of Community College of Denver

It is now possible to develop a new generation of interventions that have the potential to dramatically increase graduation rates, thanks both to recent advances in accurately identifying the young people who, absent a school-based intervention, are unlikely to earn a high school diploma and to evidence-based practices for getting them back on track. Communities seeking to determine what steps to take in existing middle and high schools to improve their holding power can use this chapter's tools on specific interventions that can help to stem the flow of young people out of schools.

For example, researchers and practitioners in Philadelphia are designing middle-grades interventions based on their sophisticated analysis of early indicators of dropping out. They provide a framework for considering which practices should be put in place throughout an entire school and which should target specific students who are showing early signs of disengaging.

Research conducted by MDRC on Talent Development High Schools has shown significant increases in the promotion power of previously low-performing high schools when ninth grade is reorganized into a small academy or learning community that allows a focus on literacy and numeracy to help students get to a level to handle high school work, extended learning time as part of an acceleration strategy, and quick response to academic failure. (Kemple, Herlihy, & Smith, 2005) This study and other emergent research suggests how important it is that leaders determine an appropriate mix of interventions—from summer programming before entry into high school for students identified as behind in skills to separate small learning communities for ninth graders.

One emerging strategy is to expand learning time for ninth graders and to use it to accelerate their learning. By expanding the school day, some small schools have been able to embed more literacy and youth-development strategies—strategies associated with achieving better educational outcomes—and they can also provide credit-recovery opportunities for youth who are already falling off track.

This chapter discusses specific strategies for preventing problems before and during high school and for intervening quickly to counter academic or social difficulties before they become overwhelming.

NOTES ON THE TOOLS

Tool 1.1: Catching It Early: The Middle Grades

Tool 1.1 draws on the work of Philadelphia researchers to identify four early indicators for identifying dropouts and presents the response strategies suggested by the research, ranging from whole-school reforms to targeted interventions. A school or schools serving grades 6 through 8 can use this tool to think through these approaches in helping the students who—according to a school's data—most need them. *Materials in this tool are based on the work of Allie Mulvihill and Liza Herzog of the Philadelphia Education Fund and Robert Balfanz of Johns Hopkins University.*

Tool 1.2: Continuum of Ninth Grade Interventions

Tool 1.2 describes a range of strategies for improving the transition into high school and the holding power of ninth grade, along with the trade-offs associated with each. A set of tools allows administrators and teachers to consider which approach is most appropriate for their schools and their students, which existing strategies they should expand, and which new interventions they would like to put into place.

Tool 1.3: Acceleration Strategies: Advancing Skills Through Credit Recovery

Tool 1.3 describes one school's approach to embedding research-based literacy strategies in a credit-recovery initiative. It also includes a set of discussion questions that can help schools determine what strategy would be most effective for off-track youth and what funding, staffing, and scheduling are required to do so. *Materials in this tool are drawn from the work of Zachary Robbins, former headmaster of the Academy for Public Service in Boston.*

TOOL 1.1: CATCHING IT EARLY: THE MIDDLE GRADES

Philadelphia researchers Robert Balfanz and Liza Herzog have identified four indicators that can predict future dropout as early as the sixth grade: failure in math (a final grade of F in mathematics), failure in literacy (a final grade of F in English), low attendance (attendance below 80 percent for the year), and behavioral difficulties (receiving a poor final behavior mark in at least one class). Students who meet any one of these markers have only a 10–20 percent chance of graduating within five years of starting the ninth grade.

Working from these data, the team from Johns Hopkins University and the Philadelphia Education Fund designed a framework for intervention in the middle grades that draws on the best available research regarding strategies to address each of the “big four” risk factors. The *Keeping Middle Grades Students on the Graduation Path* program is developing and piloting tools and practices for responding early to each of the warning signs. Recognizing that any school needs to triage its interventions to maximize resources, the team has identified strategies that can be implemented preventatively across the whole school, those that can be implemented for students who need targeted interventions, and those that can be directed at students needing intensive interventions.

This set of tools can be used to think through strategies that combine whole-school reforms with targeted interventions for the students who—according to a school’s data—most need them.

- The first set of tools focuses on identification: which schools have the most young people displaying warning signals; which students within those schools have risk factors; and what interventions are currently in place. A district may start with **Tool 1.1A** to identify priority schools, or a school with a high percentage of struggling students may start directly with **Tool 1.1B** to identify students requiring interventions.
- The second set of tools focuses on assessment: how well current interventions are working, and what new interventions might be put into place.

Directions

1. To maximize limited resources, district leadership will want to use its best available data to complete **Tool 1.1A: Identifying Schools with High Concentrations of Sixth Graders with Risk Factors** to identify the schools with the highest incidence of those students with one or more risk factors.
2. Staff at those schools either identified by the district or self-identified will want to begin by completing **Tool 1.1B: Identifying Students Sending Distress Signals** to gain a better understanding of the challenges the students face and the interventions they need.

TOOL 1.1: CATCHING IT EARLY: THE MIDDLE GRADES (CONT.)

3. Next, school staff can review **Tool 1.1C: A Framework for Interventions in the Middle Grades**. This table details the research-based interventions identified by the Philadelphia team: whole-school preventative measures (to keep 70–80 percent of students on track); additional targeted interventions (to keep the 10–20 percent who need more focused supports on track); and intensive interventions (to keep the 5–10 percent who need very-small-group or one-on-one supports on track). Determine and check off which, if any, of the interventions are already in place in the school.
4. Schools can then use **Tool 1.1D: Effective Intervention(s) Already in Place** to identify current interventions and any data on their effectiveness. Then turn to **Tool 1.1E: Additional Interventions** to identify the interventions you want to put in place, building on what your data tell you about the needs of the students in the school, what is already in place, and the resources available. Discuss why you think these interventions will give you the best return on improved outcomes for students during their middle-grade years and transition into high school.
5. Finally, use **Tool 1.1F: Next Steps for Priority Schools** to identify the next steps and a timeline for putting these interventions in place and to develop a longer-term plan for implementation of the full range of interventions—whole-school, targeted, and intensive—needed to get and keep all students on track to high school graduation.



photo courtesy of Community College of Denver

TOOL 1.1C: A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERVENTIONS IN THE MIDDLE GRADES

Partnership Activity	Attendance	Behavior	Literacy and Math
<p>Whole School v = in place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> School Attendance Policy with stated attendance goal (e.g., 95%) with clear, enforceable rewards and consequences. Attendance policy is known to students, staff, and parents/caregivers. Policy includes a section on lateness <input type="checkbox"/> Safe and welcoming school and classroom environments (e.g., clean, well lit, student work on walls) <input type="checkbox"/> Daily check-in via advisory <input type="checkbox"/> Every absence gets a response; careful record keeping <input type="checkbox"/> Recognition assemblies/incentives for good attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> School rules (no more than 4–5) with clear, enforceable rewards and consequences developed by—and held in common by—adults and students in school community and students’ homes <input type="checkbox"/> Safe and welcoming school and classroom environments (e.g., clean, well lit, student work on walls) <input type="checkbox"/> Advisories, with curriculum that addresses socially positive behaviors and community-building <input type="checkbox"/> Sixth-grade orientation to culture of school <input type="checkbox"/> Consistent analysis of “hot spot” behavior problems <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete, enforceable, public, consistent consequences for infractions <input type="checkbox"/> Recognition for positive behavior (individual, classroom, whole school) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Adoption of whole-school curriculum based on state or national standards <input type="checkbox"/> Availability of aligned core curricular materials that reflect the diverse world in which students live <input type="checkbox"/> Extended blocks of time for literacy and math (90-minute minimum) <input type="checkbox"/> Differentiated instruction with research-based curricular interventions including the use of research-based instructional (not test-prep) technology <input type="checkbox"/> Regular benchmark assessment aligned with curriculum to inform instructional decisions (e.g., every six weeks) <input type="checkbox"/> For literacy, sufficient high-interest, age- and level-appropriate fiction and nonfiction books and materials that reflect the diverse world in which students live

This tool is adapted from materials developed by Robert Balfanz of Johns Hopkins University and Liza Herzog and Allie Mulvihill of the Philadelphia Education Fund.

TOOL 1.1C: A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERVENTIONS IN THE MIDDLE GRADES (CONT.)

Partnership Activity	Attendance	Behavior	Literacy And Math
<p>Targeted ✓ = in place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Sixth-grade attendance team monitors students identified for targeted intervention <input type="checkbox"/> Personal phone calls after two unexcused absences <input type="checkbox"/> Contract when attendance/lateness doesn't improve <input type="checkbox"/> Pairing with mentor for daily check-in <input type="checkbox"/> Home visits by school/community liaison <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent targeted-group rewards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Sixth-grade behavior team determines/oversees interventions <input type="checkbox"/> Early contact with parents to convey positive information and concerns <input type="checkbox"/> Pairing with adult mentor <input type="checkbox"/> Contract when misbehavior doesn't improve <input type="checkbox"/> Small groups for daily interaction (e.g., skill development in anger management, peer mediation, grief counseling) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced student/adult ratio <input type="checkbox"/> Extra help opportunities tightly aligned with classroom instruction <input type="checkbox"/> Regular benchmark assessments <input type="checkbox"/> Additional intervention programs for intense areas of need
<p>Intensive ✓ = in place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Student assigned to case manager <input type="checkbox"/> Required meeting with parent/caregiver <input type="checkbox"/> External services (e.g., clinical support, if necessary) <input type="checkbox"/> Daily contact between parent/caregiver and case manager <input type="checkbox"/> Home visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Student assigned to case manager <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting of parents and relevant staff; develop contract <input type="checkbox"/> External services (e.g., clinical support, if necessary) <input type="checkbox"/> Daily contact with parent/caregiver <input type="checkbox"/> Home visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Effective one-on-one or very-small-group tutoring linked directly to careful assessment of student weaknesses, preferably during school day

TOOL 1.1D: EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION(S) ALREADY IN PLACE

SCHOOL:				
WHOLE SCHOOL Interventions that Are Already in Place in this School	How Long Has Intervention Been Taking Place?	Evidence, if Any, Regarding Its Effectiveness	What Steps You Will Take to Increase Effectiveness	Percentage of Students Needing Service Who Are Receiving It
Attendance				
Behavior				
Literacy and Math				

TOOL 1.1D: EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION(S) ALREADY IN PLACE (CONT.)

SCHOOL:				
TARGETED Interventions that Are Already in Place in this School	How Long Has Intervention Been Taking Place?	Evidence, if Any, Regarding Its Effectiveness	What Steps You Will Take to Increase Effectiveness	Percentage of Students Needing Service Who Are Receiving It
Attendance				
Behavior				
Literacy and Math				

TOOL 1.1D: EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION(S) ALREADY IN PLACE (CONT.)

SCHOOL:				
INTENSIVE Interventions that Are Already in Place in this School	How Long Has Intervention Been Taking Place?	Evidence, if Any, Regarding Its Effectiveness	What Steps You Will Take to Increase Effectiveness	Percentage of Students Needing Service Who Are Receiving It
Attendance				
Behavior				
Literacy and Math				

TOOL 1.1E: ADDITIONAL INTERVENTIONS

SCHOOL:			
Additional interventions that would be effective in this school. NOTE: You will not necessarily have additional interventions to address all levels or indicators.			
Whole School Interventions			What unmet need will this intervention address?
Attendance	Behavior	Literacy and Math	
Targeted Interventions			What unmet need will this intervention address?
Attendance	Behavior	Literacy and Math	
Intensive Interventions			What unmet need will this intervention address?
Attendance	Behavior	Literacy and Math	

TOOL 1.1F: NEXT STEPS FOR PRIORITY SCHOOLS

SCHOOL:			
What Interventions We Will Put in Place	Who Will Take Lead in Ensuring Implementation	Timeline for Intervention	District Support: What Specific Steps Will/Should District Take to Support Implementation
Whole School			
Targeted			
Intensive			

TOOL 1.2: CONTINUUM OF NINTH GRADE INTERVENTIONS

Directions

1. Review the range of ninth grade interventions described in **Tool 1.2A** and the benefits, challenges, and necessary conditions for each.
2. Determine if you have any of these interventions in place in your community, and use **Tool 1.2B** to assess the scope, scale, quality, and next steps for improvement of these interventions. A sample is included to guide your work.
3. You can use **Tool 1.2C** to determine the gap between supply and demand in your system and to identify next steps for expansion of your existing interventions. A sample is included to guide your work.
4. If you determine that you would like to put additional ninth grade interventions in place, you can use **Table 1.2D** to determine the need for interventions and what the opportunities and challenges are regarding creating the necessary conditions for implementation.
5. Finally, use **Table 1.2E** to summarize your findings and determine which interventions you might want to implement and/or expand and what next steps you need to take to do so.



photo courtesy of Community College of Denver

TOOL 1.2A: CONTINUUM OF NINTH GRADE INTERVENTIONS

Strategy	Research Basis	Benefits	Challenges	Necessary Conditions
<p>Pre-ninth grade intensive summer programming with ninth grade follow-up, combining intensive academic supports, close mentoring, and leadership development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significantly improved literacy/math skills and retention of off-track entering ninth graders, compared with control group, after participation in Step Up, a partnership between Open Meadow Alternative Schools and the Portland Public Schools (www.opemeadow.org) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not require significant changes in structure of ninth grade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity of local CBO or intermediary Requires data capacity to identify off-track youth before ninth grade Requires close collaboration between CBO and school for ongoing student monitoring, sharing of assignments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity to identify students needing intervention before ninth grade CBO capacity School willingness to closely engage with CBO (e.g., provide space, share data) Funding for summer programming
<p>Ninth grade academies with personalization, academic rigor, and opportunities for catch-up</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talent Development ninth grade academies have significant impact on academic course credit completion and promotion rates of first-time ninth graders, according to evaluation by MDRC (www.mdrc.org/project_29_17.html) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows personalization and smaller environments for new ninth graders Keeps students in “regular” high school Provides opportunities, both in school and after school, for catch-up and intensive preparation for success in high-school-level work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not promote vertical accountability (from ninth to twelfth grade) among teachers Students must make two transitions: from eighth to ninth and again from ninth to tenth grades Can result in resource imbalance in school if most energized teachers move to lower grades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility to organize small learning communities with teachers sharing students and common planning time Curriculum for high school success strategies Capacity to implement advisories Resources for extended day

TOOL 1.2A: CONTINUUM OF NINTH GRADE INTERVENTIONS (CONT.)

Strategy	Research Basis	Benefits	Challenges	Necessary Conditions
<p>Expanded school day that combines credit recovery, youth development, and academic acceleration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research has shown that expanding the learning day, when coupled with focused attention on the quality of instruction, can improve student achievement and help close the achievement gap, particularly for low-performing and high-poverty students (www.tasc.org) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can allow credit-recovery opportunities to enable students to get back on track quickly rather than continue to fall behind 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be challenge to compete with after-school jobs, family responsibilities • Requires resources for extended day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for expanded day programming (e.g., stipends for faculty) • Alignment between expanded day and school curricula • Partnerships for linked after-school jobs, etc. (if this is identified strategy to meet students' need to work)
<p>Alternative schools designed for sixteen-year-old students entering ninth grade (two years off track), with personalization and high-quality instruction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boston Day and Evening Academy, serving over-age ninth graders to graduation, has shown significant improvement in students' performance on state standardized test (MCAS) (www.bacademy.org) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows personalization and focused programming specific to the needs of over-age entering ninth grade students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run risk of "tracking" • Requires data capacity to identify off-track youth before ninth grade • Requires resources beyond per-pupil dollars to provide adequate wraparound supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per-pupil pass-through dollars; curriculum, budget, hiring, schedule flexibility • Additional resources for wraparound supports • Standards-based curriculum with acceleration strategies

TOOL 1.2B: IMPROVING INTERVENTIONS ALREADY IN PLACE IN OUR COMMUNITY

Strategy	What's in Place in Our System? (Brief Description)	What Elements or Conditions Described in Tool 1.1A Do We Want to Strengthen or Put in Place?	What Data, if Any, Do We Have on Current Program that Can Help Guide Our Improvement Efforts?	Possible Next Steps for Improvement
Pre-ninth grade summer programming with ninth grade follow-up	Our district only has traditional summer school for students who have failed eighth-grade courses *	Incorporate youth development supports and mentoring component *	Failure rates of students taking summer courses indicate this programming does not address academic challenges *	Partner with CBOs that serve this population to design more effective summer programming *
Ninth grade academies	Four of our schools have ninth grade academies *	Curriculum for high school success strategies *	No disaggregated data available *	Need to disaggregate data on academies to determine effectiveness; implement curriculum for high school success strategies *
Expanded school day	One or two high schools have after-school arts and homework help *	Credit recovery for students failing ninth grade courses, combined with mentoring and academic supports *	No data available *	Assist schools to restructure homework help to include credit-recovery opportunities; identify staffing required *
Alternative schools designed for sixteen-year-old students entering ninth grade (two years off track)	We do not have any alternative schools for this population *			

* example

TOOL 1.2B: IMPROVING INTERVENTIONS ALREADY IN PLACE IN OUR COMMUNITY (CONT.)

Strategy	What's in Place in Our System? (Brief Description)	What Elements or Conditions Described in Tool 1.1A Do We Want to Strengthen or Put in Place?	What Data, if Any, Do We Have on Current Program that Can Help Guide Our Improvement Efforts?	Possible Next Steps for Improvement
Pre-ninth grade summer programming with ninth grade follow-up				
Ninth grade academies				
Expanded school day				
Alternative schools designed for sixteen-year-old students entering ninth grade (two years off track)				

TOOL 1.2C: EXPANDING INTERVENTIONS ALREADY IN PLACE IN OUR COMMUNITY

Strategy	Scope in System (e.g., number of programs, where located, number served)	Gap Between Supply and Demand (e.g., how many additional students would benefit)	Challenges to Expansion (refer to conditions necessary for implementation, Tool 1.2A)	Possible Next Steps for Improvement
Pre-ninth grade summer programming with ninth grade follow-up	No programming in place *			
Ninth grade academies	Three schools have ninth grade academies, serving 100 students each *	An additional six schools might benefit (600 students) *	No teacher buy-in of small learning communities at expansion schools *	Conduct evaluation of effectiveness of ninth grade academies; engage faculty in reviewing data *
Expanded school day	Four schools have extended day reaching all ninth graders *	All twelve high schools could benefit: we have a gap of eight schools *	Funding needed *	Seek state funding for extended-day programming *
Alternative schools designed for sixteen-year-old students entering ninth grade (two years off track)	None *			No programming in place *

* example

TOOL 1.2C: EXPANDING INTERVENTIONS ALREADY IN PLACE IN OUR COMMUNITY

Strategy	Scope in System (e.g., number of programs, where located, number served)	Gap Between Supply and Demand (e.g., how many additional students would benefit)	Challenges to Expansion (refer to conditions necessary for implementation, Tool 1.2A)	Possible Next Steps for Improvement
Pre-ninth grade summer programming with ninth grade follow-up				
Ninth grade academies				
Expanded school day				
Alternative schools designed for sixteen-year-old students entering ninth grade (two years off track)				

TOOL 1.2D: NEW/ADDITIONAL INTERVENTIONS WE WANT TO PUT IN PLACE IN OUR COMMUNITY

Strategy	Demand for Program (i.e. number of students who could benefit)	Necessary Conditions (check if in place)	Creating Necessary Conditions		Next Steps for Moving Forward
			Opportunities	Challenges	
Pre-ninth grade summer programming with ninth grade follow-up		<input type="checkbox"/> Capacity to identify students needing intervention before ninth grade <input type="checkbox"/> CBO capacity <input type="checkbox"/> School willingness to closely engage with CBO (e.g., provide space, share data) <input type="checkbox"/> Funding for summer programming			
Ninth grade academies		<input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility to organize small learning communities with teachers sharing students and common planning time <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum for high school success strategies <input type="checkbox"/> Capacity to implement advisories <input type="checkbox"/> Resources for extended day			

TOOL 1.2D: NEW/ADDITIONAL INTERVENTIONS WE WANT TO PUT IN PLACE IN OUR COMMUNITY (CONT.)

Strategy	Demand for Program (i.e. number of students who could benefit)	Necessary Conditions (check if in place)	Creating Necessary Conditions		Next Steps for Moving Forward
			Opportunities	Challenges	
Expanded school day		<input type="checkbox"/> Funding for expanded-day programming (e.g., stipends for faculty) <input type="checkbox"/> Alignment between expanded-day and school curricula <input type="checkbox"/> Partnerships for linked after-school jobs, etc. (if this is identified strategy to meet students' need to work)			
Alternative schools designed for sixteen-year-old students entering ninth grade (two years off track)		<input type="checkbox"/> Per-pupil pass-through dollars; curriculum, budget, hiring, schedule flexibility <input type="checkbox"/> Additional resources for wraparound supports <input type="checkbox"/> Standards-based curriculum with acceleration strategies			

TOOL 1.2E: SUMMARY OF PRIORITIES FOR NEXT YEAR: IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES TIMELINE

IMPROVING Interventions Already in Place in Our Community (see Tool 1.2B)					
Strategy	Implementation Activities (6–12 months)	Expected Completion Date for Each Activity	Lead Person Responsible	Benchmarks	
				3–6 months	9–12 months
Pre-ninth-grade summer programming with ninth grade follow-up					
Ninth grade academies					
Expanded school day					
Alternative schools designed for sixteen-year-old students entering ninth grade (two years off track)					
EXPANDING Interventions Already in Our Community (see Tool 1.2C)					
Strategy	Implementation Activities (6–12 months)	Expected Completion Date for Each Activity	Lead Person Responsible	Benchmarks	
				3–6 months	9–12 months
Pre-ninth-grade summer programming with ninth grade follow-up					

TOOL 1.2F: SUMMARY OF PRIORITIES FOR NEXT YEAR: IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES TIMELINE

EXPANDING Interventions Already in Our Community (see Tool 1.2C) (cont.)					
Ninth grade academies					
Expanded school day					
Alternative schools designed for sixteen-year-old students entering ninth grade (two years off track)					
NEW/ADDITIONAL Interventions We Want to Put in Place					
Strategy	Implementation Activities (6–12 months)	Expected Completion Date for Each Activity	Lead Person Responsible	Benchmarks	
				3–6 months	9–12 months
Pre-ninth grade summer programming with ninth grade follow-up					
Ninth grade academies					
Expanded school day					
Alternative schools designed for sixteen-year-old students entering ninth grade (two years off track)					

TOOL 1.3: ACCELERATION STRATEGIES: ADVANCING SKILLS THROUGH CREDIT RECOVERY

Directions

After reading the case below, turn to **Tool 1.3A** to determine whether your school could benefit from a credit-recovery program, and if yes, which students will be served, what funding and staffing are required, and what scheduling you will put into place. Then turn to **Tool 1.3B** to explore how you can apply the key lessons from Boston's Academy of Public Service to your programming.

Accelerating Literacy in a Credit Recovery Program at the Academy of Public Service

In developing approaches to accelerate the literacy gains of struggling students, it is important to develop models for credit recovery to ensure that these students strengthen their core academic skills while making progress toward graduation. Students with literacy challenges often have fallen behind in credits because they are unable to keep up with the demands of their coursework.

The Academy of Public Service (APS) was originally a selective “career academy” program for high-achieving students attending Boston's Dorchester High School. While the APS program provided a rigorous learning environment and rich internship experiences for a small group of students, Dorchester High School overall was plagued by low achievement scores, chronic truancy, and the disparaging moniker “Dumb-chester High School.” In 2003, as part of an intervention to turn around this troubled school, Dorchester High School (now known as the Dorchester Education Complex) was converted to three small schools. APS became one of those new small schools, maintaining the theme of public and community service, public speaking, and government relations, but now serving a population more representative of the entire school—and more academically challenged.

Investment in the potential of all of the students in the school has been a priority for the APS headmaster. Now, with 300 students, APS serves a much broader range of students, but the smaller environment enables staff to identify those who are struggling for targeted intervention. As is common in many urban high schools, data on APS students revealed a number of sophomores who had very low scores on their GRADE reading assessment and were, not surprisingly, behind in credits. To meet the needs of these students, the school needed an acceleration, rather than a remediation, strategy—accelerating literacy gains while simultaneously providing credit-recovery options to move students along the path to graduation.

This objective presented multiple challenges: high school teachers were not trained to teach reading, particularly to high school students with elementary-level skills; these youngsters were transitioning to high school without the skills or credits to make timely progress to graduation; and no programming was in place in the high school to meet their needs with the current school schedule or staffing arrangement. These challenges posed a number of pressing design issues to consider in order to develop the appropriate programming:

- Based on the data, what are the characteristics of the target population?
How many students could benefit?
- How many students can the program support?
- What program components would need to be in place to meet these needs?
- Would the school need to buy an existing package or could it build a literacy approach to meet the needs of the students and fit the context of the school?
- What operational issues need to be addressed when designing the program: staffing, scheduling, and/or resources?

After considering these questions, APS staff designed the program to target ninth- and tenth-grade students who scored at the lowest two levels on their reading assessment, as well as a few eleventh- and twelfth-graders teachers indicated “couldn’t read.” However, as a credit-recovery program, the class also included strong readers who needed to make up credits. With this mix of students, there was less stigma associated with being in the class. But the mix of students’ needs required an approach that could accelerate learning gains for low-skilled readers and at the same time accelerate credit recovery for students at varying reading levels. To ensure that the program could be funded through the school’s general operating budget, the total cohort for the pilot program was limited to 20 students (15 completed the program) and the class was designed as a school-day academic course.

The headmaster and teachers designed a program that emphasized the dual components of literacy enrichment for younger students and credit recovery for older students. Students in the program took a credit-recovery class with an intensive focus on reading comprehension, along with their content course, English Language Arts (ELA). (Ninth graders took the credit-recovery course in lieu of ELA.) With this design, the students continued to progress through the curriculum but also received the intensive literacy support necessary to build the reading skills necessary to succeed in their classes.

The credit-recovery class was kept very small—fifteen students taught by three staff—to ensure a learning environment that could meet individual needs and promote close relationships between students and staff. Given the importance of the teacher-student relationship, the headmaster placed great importance on identifying the personnel for the program. The program was anchored by a highly skilled and engaging ELA teacher viewed as a leader by other faculty. In addition, the school guidance counselor and a community field coordinator (CFC) taught the class. The headmaster enlisted these additional staff to meet the additional needs of the students: the CFC was certified in elementary education and the guidance counselor was a man with a counseling background. APS’s intensive approach to credit recovery emerged from a recognition of how far behind the students were in their reading level (some were reading at an elementary level) and how much fear had developed in students who had faced chronic failure. Bringing together this team also provided professional development of the staff, who could share strategies and lessons from their areas of expertise toward the same goal of accelerating students’ reading.

While only a few staff taught the ELA and credit-recovery courses, the school leader designed a program to build a schoolwide culture around literacy. All teachers were considered “reading specialists” under this program design. The school purchased Passport Voyager Journeys Reading Program, developed by Reading First Report Experts, to provide professional development for high school teachers learning to teach reading. The funding for the program came from the district. Faculty members from the University of Massachusetts, a longtime partner, provided ongoing professional development to build the capacity of staff to be reading teachers. Over the course of the year, all teachers received the necessary training to become reading teachers.

Having well-regarded staff anchor the program helped engage students in recovery. Even then, students confessed that they were somewhat resistant to participating. Once they did, they didn’t want out. Specifically, they enjoyed the small class size, the focus on skills they didn’t have, the sense of community, and knowing they were getting something out of the program.

What did the students get out of the program? Based on an assessment of student data, participants increased their reading scores by an entire grade level at the end of the three-month pilot. In fact, student achievement increased in subjects other than English, such as social studies. Credit-recovery data showed that students made progress to graduation while building skills; twelfth graders graduated on time. Students were also interviewed during the program to get their impressions. Their bottom line was that “this [program] is important to me.”

The transformation of Dorchester High School into a campus of three small schools is now bearing fruit. At the Academy for Public Service MCAS math scores increased by 34 percent and English scores by 33 percent. The other two schools in the complex, Noonan Business Academy and TechBoston Academy, also boasted significant gains. Over the school’s entryway a sign challenging the old moniker “Dumb-chester” reads “We knew we were smart, now the world does too.”

TOOL 1.3A: PLANNING A CREDIT-RECOVERY PROGRAM

Planning Area	Key Questions	In Our School...
Characteristics of Targeted Populations	How many of our students could benefit from a credit-recovery program?	
	Are they dispersed across the school or concentrated in one or two grades? Which ones?	
Funding	How many have poor reading skills and how many are strong readers who need to make up credits?	
	What current funding might we leverage for a credit-recovery program?	
Staffing	What additional funding do we need to leverage?	
	What teachers do we need to address the populations of students we've identified?	
Scheduling	What counselors and/or mentors do we need to ensure that students are engaged and to address the range of student needs?	
	What scheduling changes do we need to make so as to incorporate a credit-recovery class?	

TOOL 1.3B: DRAWING ON THE LESSONS FROM APS

Key Lessons from APS	Key Questions	What We Have in Place to Build On	What We Need to Develop
<i>Materials matter</i>	<p>What curriculum that you know of or use features a student-centered pedagogy that supports students' understanding of increasingly difficult texts as well as their ability to communicate their own ideas?</p> <p>What books will be appropriate for your students, in terms of skill level and interest?</p>		
<i>Teachers are learners too</i>	<p>What professional development strategies will need to be in place to develop teacher capacity?</p>		
<i>Students need supports so they will gain access to what's good for them</i>	<p>How will the school engage students in the program and give them a sense that this program will accelerate them?</p> <p>How can schools avoid stigmatizing students who participate in these programs?</p>		
<i>Students need to get what they came for</i>	<p>To ensure that students' needs are being met, what types of assessments will need to be in place to measure student gains and outcomes?</p>		
<i>Programs need to continually raise the bar</i>	<p>What strategies will need to be in place for continual improvement of the program in response to results from the assessments?</p>		



EXPANDING THE OPTIONS

In most cities, few educational alternatives exist for young people who have fallen significantly off track to graduation and who have little likelihood of catching up and graduating in the traditional high school. While much can be done in existing high schools to intervene more quickly and efficiently with students who are just beginning to fall behind (see Chapter 1), cities face a significant “supply gap” of options for youth who have already dropped out or who are still enrolled but face little prospect of graduating on time, if at all. The lack of high-quality options for this population is a primary reason behind the swelling ranks of 17- to 25-year olds crowding into adult education GED programs across the country, most of which are ill-equipped to handle the influx of young people.

A handful of cities across the country has begun to take a systemic approach, designing and launching a range of learning options—all leading to college-ready graduation—that are intentionally designed for youth who have fallen far behind and have little likelihood of graduating. Unlike those engaged in previous efforts, these communities are starting with a careful look at the academic trajectories of students who are not making it through to graduation to determine what options are needed.

New York City led the way in 2006 with the release of its groundbreaking data analysis, conducted by the Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (OMPG) in conjunction with the Parthenon Group, on students who fall off track to high school graduation. Looking beyond simple four-year-cohort graduation numbers, New York identified the size and characteristics of the over-age, undercredited population, both in school and out of school, by age and credit accumulation. They then turned to the existing array of schools—large comprehensive, small, and alternative schools—to determine their effectiveness with these populations. After determining which schools were beating the odds in terms of graduation rates with this set of young people, the school department’s OMPG launched an aggressive effort to create a differentiated portfolio of schools designed for specific segments of off-track students.

Other communities have begun to follow suit, using data to gain a better understanding of their off-track population and to drive their investments, and ensuring that their designs are specific to the populations identified as off track by the data analyses. There have been some interesting findings: in Boston and Portland, Oregon, for example, data indicate that a considerable proportion of the off-track population includes youth who are low-literacy English Language Learners recently arrived from other countries. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Mobile, Alabama; Jacksonville, Florida; Brockton, Massachusetts; and a host of other cities are doing analyses as well.

This more intentional and strategic approach is beginning to provide very positive trend data. For example, a recent New York City Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation report indicates that Transfer schools—small, personalized high schools designed to enable over-age and undercredited students to get back on track to a diploma—are graduating two to three times more of their off-track students than are comprehensive high schools (Cahill 2006; Lynch 2006). The process that is emerging in New York and other cities offers critical guideposts and highlights important decision points for other communities newer to this work.

One of the first steps in expanding a portfolio to include options for off-track youth is to consider the entirety of the current landscape. What options exist, and where in the system do they “sit”? Are there charter schools or adult-education programs that serve an off-track youth population? What does a map of the current landscape say about who the district is serving and who is left unserved? Are there any data on the effectiveness of these options?

Then, a district can turn to data on students who are not faring well in high school or who have dropped out altogether to identify what new school options are needed. By unpacking the data on over-age and undercredited students, for example, New York City leaders learned that this population included a range of students, from 15- or 16-year-olds who have accrued very few, if any, high school credits to 17- to 19-year-olds who are only a few credits short of graduation but have responsibilities that make it difficult for them to finish at a traditionally structured high school. New York City’s programmatic offerings are specifically directed at the populations they need to engage (Cahill 2006; Lynch 2006).

The next set of questions a district must consider concerns the capacity to launch new schools. A promising approach to creating effective schools for this group of young people involves an inside/outside strategy that leverages the expertise of outside school-development and community-based youth-development entities, where available, and is rooted in an effective, internal (district) entity that can ensure alignment with the district’s overall high school reform agenda. The specific roles of the inside and outside entities regarding school development vary, depending on local conditions. In some communities, an “inside” school-development outfit can manage all aspects of planning and launching schools, with specific roles for outside organizations. In others, the district will use data to identify needs of the out-of-school population and to manage school performance but will contract out school-development services.

There are district and contractual policy conditions to consider, as well. Schools that are showing effectiveness in serving off-track youth have the flexibility to hire staff, build and manage budgets, design curricula and assessments, and create schedules and school calendars that will pay off for this population. A district needs to determine how it can create these conditions for their schools serving off-track youth—through, for example, extending existing flexibilities to all or a subset of schools, providing policy waivers, using chartering authority, and creating special contracts with school developers.

Finally, districts have to put in place an infrastructure that ensures that youth reentering the education pipeline understand what options are available, what steps they need to take to reengage young people, and how credits from prior schooling—from within the district or from a school associated with adjudication—will transfer. A handful of districts—especially Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland (Oregon), and San Jose—who participated in the systemic, cross-sector Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG) initiative—have begun to build the foundations of such an infrastructure and can provide useful models for other districts.

The tools in this chapter address these questions and offer strategies to better serve young people who are on their way toward dropping out or have dropped out altogether. It is important to note that the tools are designed to accompany a deep consideration of the data on young people who are falling off track in high school. Pioneering cities have taken different approaches to developing this data, but in all cases they have combined an expansion of internal data capacity with the use of external research contractors.



photo courtesy of Sinclair Community College

NOTES ON THE TOOLS

Tool 2.1: Mapping Your Portfolio of Secondary Options

Tool 2.1 has two parts: The first section walks through a sample district's portfolio of options. The second offers a process for "mapping" your own system and considering potential next steps in expanding your portfolio. *Materials in this tool are based on the work of Leslie Rennie-Hill and Carole Smith of the Portland, Oregon, Public Schools.*

Tool 2.2: Designing a Data Analysis

Tool 2.2 offers a summary of various city data analyses and a sample Request for Proposals to secure a data partner that can conduct a longitudinal analysis in your own community to identify off-track populations. It includes a set of guiding questions to help you determine next steps for your community in securing a data analysis of off-track and out-of-school youth. *Materials in this tool are based on the work of Audrey Bode of the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.*

Tool 2.3: Assessing Your District's Capacity to Launch Schools for Off-Track Youth

Tool 2.3 helps a district to identify and assess key levers at the district level to support the development of a portfolio of options that can move all students—including struggling students and out-of-school youth—to graduation and college readiness.

Tool 2.4: Creating Multiple Pathways to Graduation

Tool 2.4 provides a framework for considering what options are needed for different populations of young people who are not on track to graduation. Depending on how old these youths are, and what their skill levels are, they will need different options. *Materials in this tool are based on the work of JoEllen Lynch and Leah Hamilton of the New York City Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation, Michele Cahill of Carnegie Corporation of New York, Peter Kleinbard of the Youth Development Institute, and Kathi Mullin of the Boston Public Schools.*

Tool 2.5: Reentry into the Pipeline

Tool 2.5 is designed to assess a district's policies and practices regarding reentry of youth who have prematurely exited high school. It contains four sections: mapping current options and the information available regarding those options; assessing current and potential reentry points; smoothing the transition process; and building an infrastructure for sharing information about returning students with the schools they reenter.

TOOL 2.1: MAPPING YOUR PORTFOLIO OF SECONDARY OPTIONS

Portland, Oregon, has a graphic of its portfolio of high schools (pages 42–44) that is unique in incorporating all types of schools, including large schools with small learning communities, buildings with co-located autonomous small schools, and alternative schools for off-track students operated by the district and community-based organizations.

To achieve the depth and breadth of their portfolio, the district has been intentional in ensuring that each of the four major geographic regions of the city offers options to students, including:

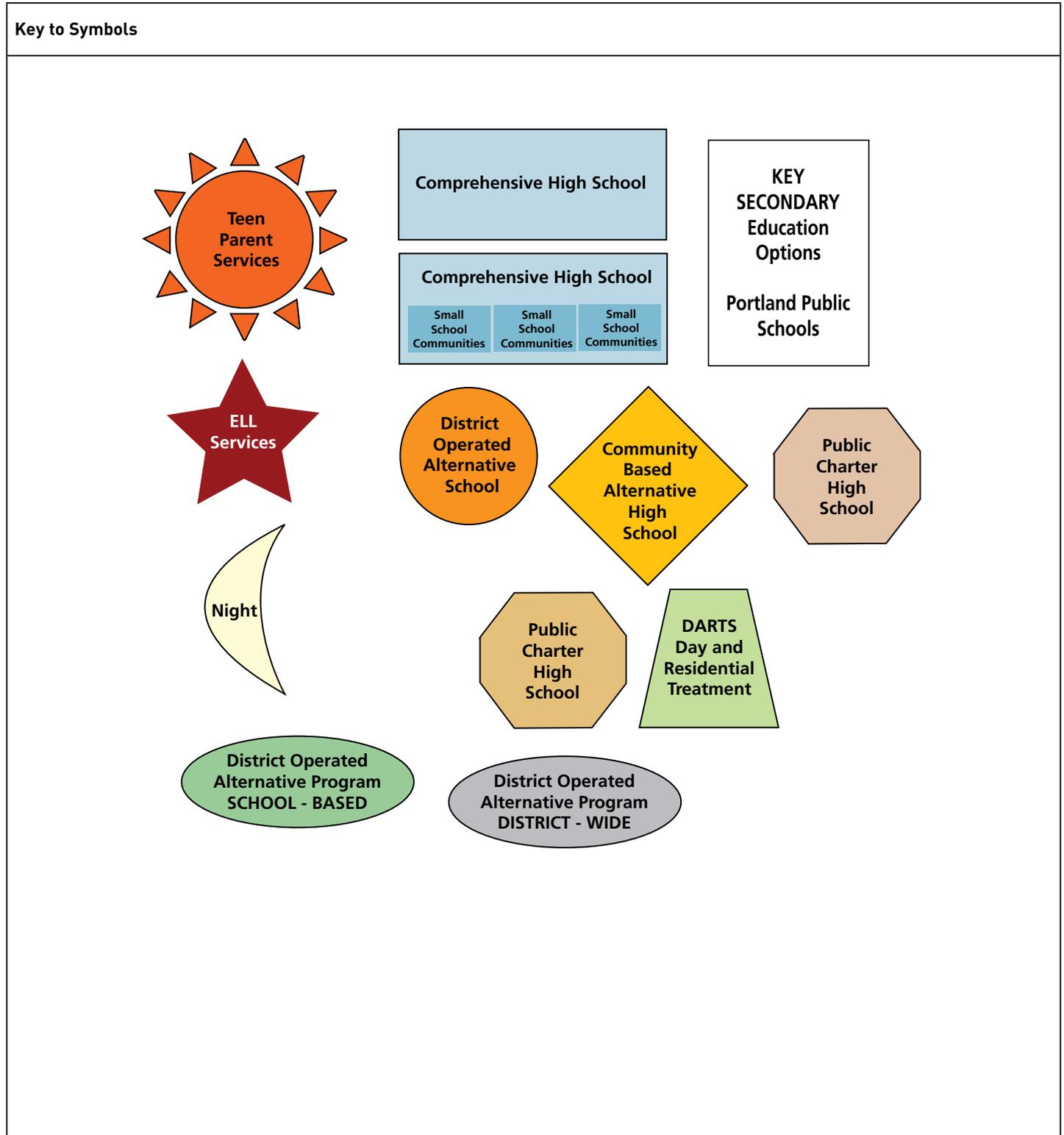
- Comprehensive high schools, some of which house small school communities and/or alternative programs/night schools
- Stand-alone alternative schools, both district-operated and community-based
- Programs serving specific populations, such as teen parents or English Language Learners

TOOL 2.1A: EXEMPLAR OF A SYSTEM MAP

Table 1: What Portland’s Secondary “Map” Tells Us		
Question	Our Conclusions	Evidence from Map Supporting Conclusions
What does the map tell you about which student populations have received attention in terms of school design?		
What does the map tell you about how schools are organized across the different types of schools?		
What does the map tell you about the priorities of the high school reform agenda?		



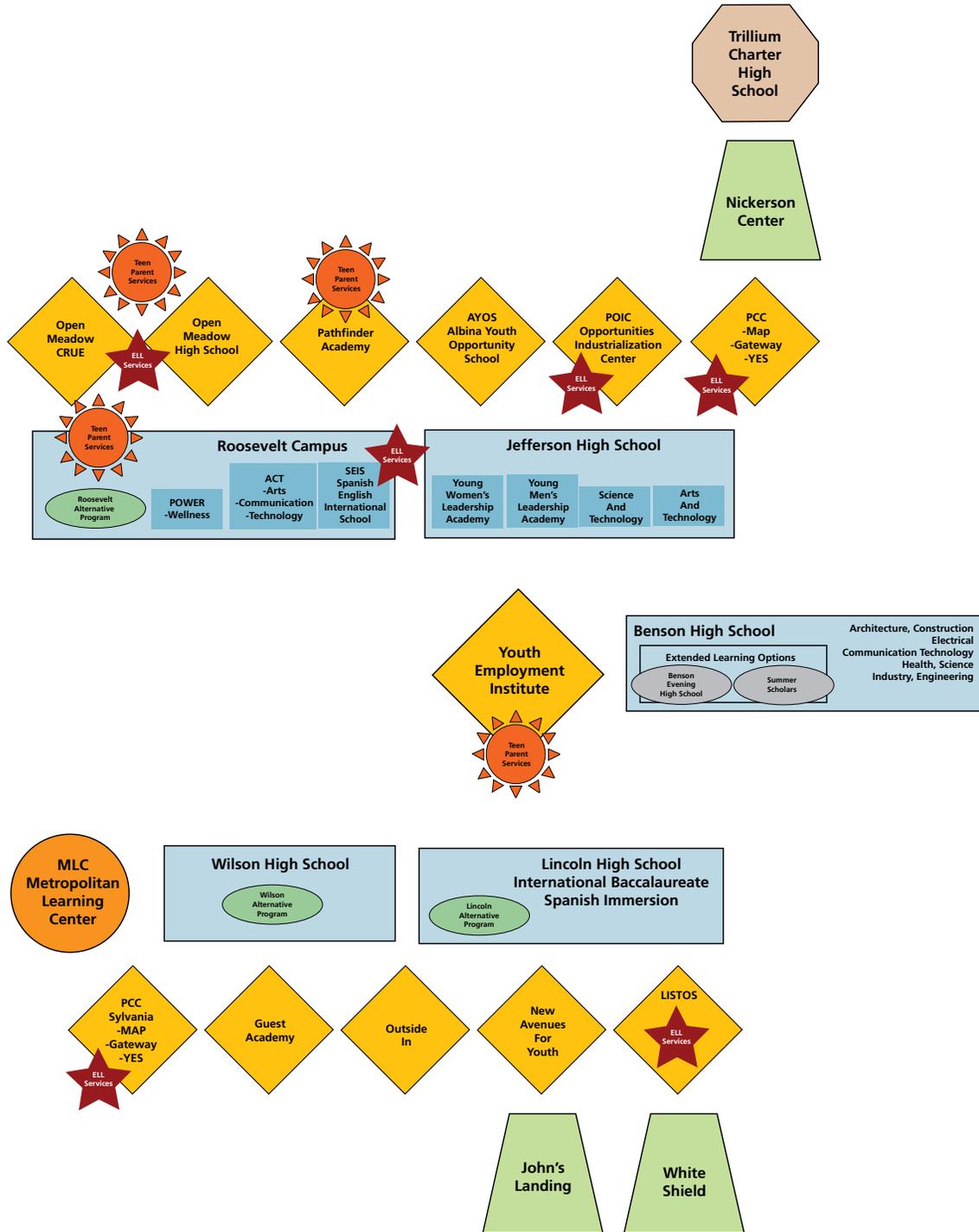
TOOL 2.1A: EXEMPLAR OF A SYSTEM MAP (CONT.)





TOOL 2.1A: EXEMPLAR OF A SYSTEM MAP (CONT.)

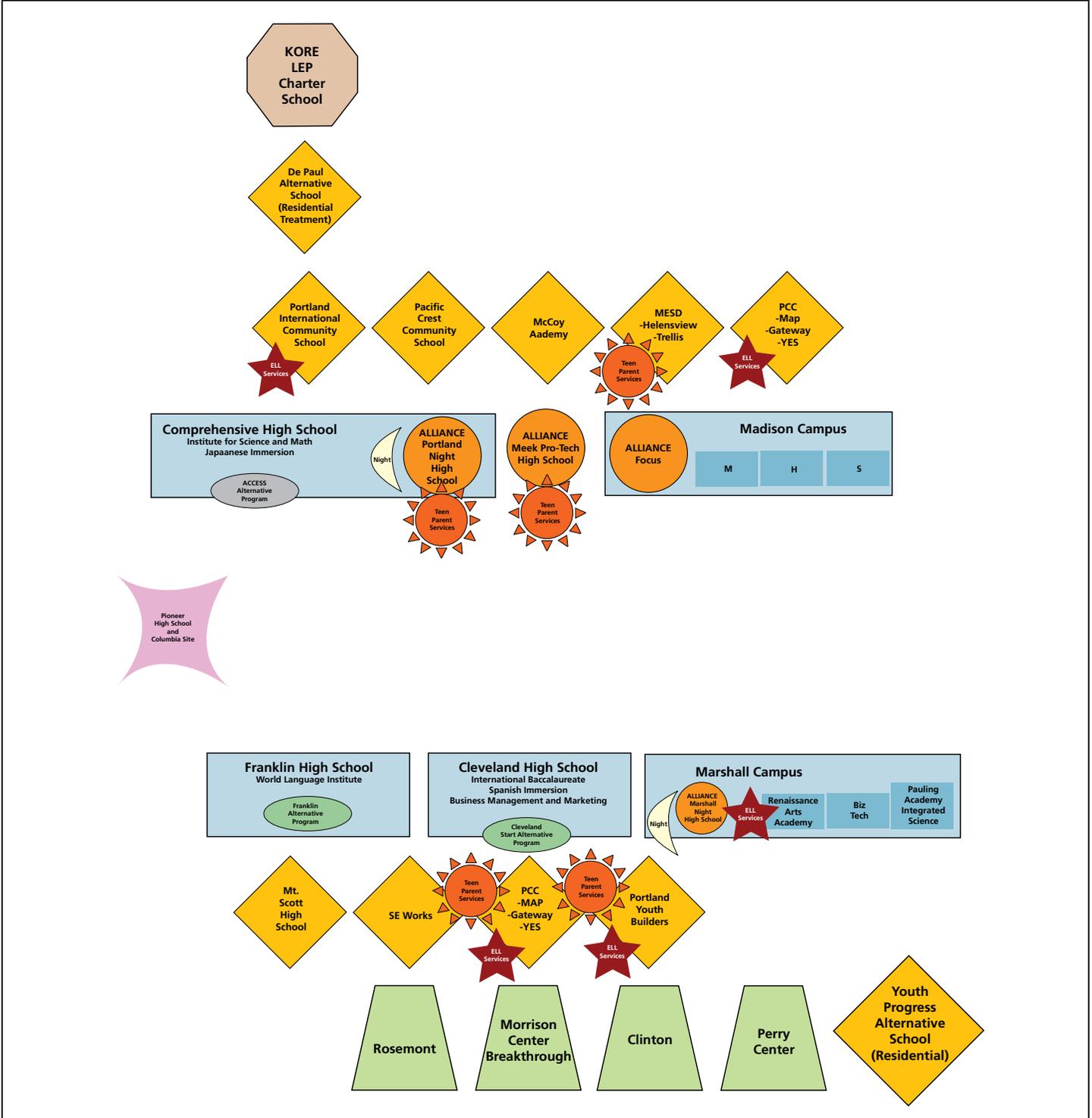
Map of Portland's Secondary Schools, Part 1





2.1A: EXEMPLAR OF A SYSTEM MAP (CONT.)

Map of Portland's Secondary Schools, Part 2



2.1B: DRAW AND ASSESS YOUR SECONDARY SYSTEM

Directions

With your team, use flip-chart paper or whatever materials or tools are available to you to graphically represent your own community's "portfolio." Be sure to include as much detail as possible regarding all the places where young people are educated in your community: large comprehensive high schools; small schools or small learning communities within large high schools; magnet schools; alternative schools; night schools where students make up credits; and programs for special populations.

After you complete your graphic representation, discuss and answer the following questions. You may want to consider dividing your planning team into two- and three-person teams to allow members to dig deeper into the questions, and then return to the full team to share and discuss conclusions.

1. What does your portfolio tell you about your priorities in high school reform? For example, has the priority been to improve comprehensive high schools, create new options, and/or engage community partners in running schools?
2. What does your portfolio say about your district's focus on specific populations of students? Are any populations enrolled in options specifically designed for their needs? Are there any data as to their effectiveness with those populations?
3. What, if any, next steps or needed changes in your high school reform agenda does your portfolio map suggest?
4. What additional information or data do you need to know which populations of students are benefiting from the current school designs and which are not?

TOOL 2.2: DESIGNING A DATA ANALYSIS

As **Tool 2.1** makes clear, a review of a portfolio is not enough to determine what new or redesigned options are needed: it is critical to gather accurate longitudinal data on which populations of youth are falling off the track to graduation and on the type of school or program they are most likely to succeed in.

While some districts may have the capacity to conduct this type of analysis, the research is usually undertaken in conjunction with a research entity—such as a postsecondary institution or a nonprofit or for-profit research organization—that has expertise in this type of segmented analysis. A Memorandum of Agreement will need to be crafted to allow access to student-level data, clarify roles of the research partner and the district, give timelines for deliverables, and define expected products (such as only data tables or a full written analysis of the data).

Several communities have designed a Request for Proposals to secure a data partner to conduct the research according to their specifications. This tool offers a review of other cities' data efforts, with links to their publications. It also includes a sample RFP, drawn from one designed by Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board (TRWIB) under the U.S. Department of Labor's Multiple Education Pathways Blueprint Initiative. This RFP can serve as a model for your own efforts to secure a data partner for your analysis of your off-track and out-of-school youth.



photo courtesy of Community College of Baltimore County

TOOL 2.2: DESIGNING A DATA ANALYSIS (CONT.)

Part I: Existing Analyses of Off-Track Populations to Review

New York City hired the Parthenon Group to work in conjunction with them to do their initial data analysis, which drove the development of their multiple-pathways portfolio. First, they identified the size and characteristics of the over-age, under-credited population by age and credit accumulation. After determining which schools were beating the odds in graduating this set of young people, the city's Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation undertook a significant effort to create a differentiated portfolio of schools designed for specific segments of off-track students.

» *For more information, go to <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/AlternativesHS/Resources/default.htm>*

In Philadelphia, Robert Balfanz at Johns Hopkins University and Ruth Neild of the University of Pennsylvania (now also at Johns Hopkins) analyzed data on high school students to identify the scope and characteristics of the off-track population. Balfanz and Neild had access to a unique data set in the Kids Integrated Data System, which merged individual data over a period of years from the school district and the city's social-service agencies, including the Department of Public Health, the Department of Human Services, and the Office of Emergency Shelter and Services. They found that 80 percent of dropouts in the city's high schools were either at-risk eighth graders (with poor attendance and/or a failing grade in math and/or English) or at-risk ninth graders (youth who were not at-risk eighth graders but who had poor attendance, accumulated fewer than two credits, and/or were not promoted to the tenth grade on time). Youth involved in public care (e.g., in foster care or adjudication) were a small proportion of dropouts overall, but had especially high dropout rates (Neild & Balfanz 2006).

» *For more information, go to www.pyninc.org/publications.html*

In Chicago, studies conducted by Elaine Allensworth and colleagues at the Consortium on Chicago School Research, using data from the Chicago public schools, showed that an on-track indicator that signals when ninth graders are falling seriously off the track to earning a diploma is 85 percent predictive of future dropouts. A student is considered on track at the end of ninth grade if he or she has earned at least five full-time course credits and no more than one F (based on semester marks) in a core academic course (Allensworth & Easton 2005).

» *For more information, go to <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/index.php>*

The process of developing a set of indicators that predict dropping out is delineated fully in a paper prepared by Craig Jerald for *Staying the Course: High Standards and Improved Graduation Rates*, a joint project of Achieve and Jobs for the Future, funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York. Jerald's paper draws on the work of Balfanz, Allensworth, and others identified here. It includes a tool that guides districts through steps to conduct a longitudinal cohort study, analyze the data to identify the most critical risk factors for dropping out in their community, conduct a pipeline analysis based on those risk factors, assess the potential benefits of interventions triggered by the analysis, and conduct a school-level analysis to identify which schools put students at an even greater risk of dropping out (Jerald 2006).

» *To download *Staying the Course*, go to http://www.jff.org/Knowledge_Center.php*

TOOL 2.2: DESIGNING A DATA ANALYSIS (CONT.)**Directions**

Review the questions below, and then review the sample RFP. When you have finished, return to the questions to plan your next steps in developing your RFP. The process of developing your own RFP should help you clarify the purpose, intent, and scope of your data analysis, in addition to leading to the selection of a data partner.

Questions to Consider in Securing a Data Partner

1. In the RFP below, what is the purpose of the data analysis? What will the data be used for?
2. What key indicators will the successful applicant be analyzing?
3. What specific skills and capacities is the TRWIB looking for in a data partner?
4. What does this RFP suggest to you about your own next steps in designing and conducting a data analysis?
5. What do you hope will be the end result of your data analysis? What strategies are you hoping to inform?
6. What potential local and/or national research entities might you invite to respond to your RFP?
7. What permissions will you need to ensure that your data partner has access to appropriate data?

TOOL 2.2: DESIGNING A DATA ANALYSIS (CONT.)

TRWIB, Inc.

Request for Proposal for Research and Data Analysis

Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board (TRWIB, Inc.) is requesting proposals from qualified individuals and firms for research and data analysis. The proposed project involves conducting quantitative analysis of Pittsburgh Public School's (PPS) dropouts and off-track student populations. The final research product should provide a statistically sound profile of students who drop out of the PPS system.

Your proposal is expected to cover the following services:

1. Gathering and cleaning relevant data for analysis
2. Analyzing data to answer research questions about PPS dropouts
3. Providing an explanation and interpretation of data and findings
4. Presenting a final written and oral report of the findings

Work and Outcomes

TRWIB, Inc., the City of Pittsburgh, and PPS are seeking a consultant to conduct quantitative research on out-of-school and at-risk youth in the Pittsburgh Public School System. This project will primarily involve secondary data analysis, and longitudinal aspects will require looking at elementary, middle, and high school data. Analysis will be based on school data available from PPS, and other data as available and relevant.

Respondent will be expected to undertake quantitative analysis of data sources to:

- *Identify the appropriate cohort of students to follow for this study.* In order to identify early indicators of dropping out researchers will need to follow a cohort of students from sixth grade through two years past their expected graduation date. In addition to demographic data and data on the potential indicators listed below, researchers will also need to know the students' status in each following year: enrolled, transferred, or dropped out. Researchers will work with the Pittsburgh Public School system to identify the most recent class of students that will allow for the richest and most informative analysis given the parameters of the study.
- *Analyze the cohort to identify key indicators that can predict students who are at risk of dropping out.* Indicators should be school-related factors that appear in grades 6 through 12 and should have a high predictive power. Potential data points include but are not limited to:
 - » Total number of credits earned
 - » Number of CTE credits earned
 - » Number of academic credits earned
 - » Test scores
 - » Letter or numeric grades
 - » Overall GPA
 - » Attendance and reasons for absence
 - » Grade level and age
 - » Disciplinary/behavioral data
 - » Demographic information

TOOL 2.2: DESIGNING A DATA ANALYSIS (CONT.)**TRWIB, Inc.****Request for Proposal for Research and Data Analysis cont.**

Researchers are looking for indicators that are “high yield.” That is, they are both comprehensive (a significant number of students who drop out exhibit the indicator) and predictive (students who present the indicator have a much higher likelihood of dropping out). Other information on student characteristics (ELL or special ed status), school-level characteristics (such as school size or enrollment policies), and involvement in other systems (court involved, foster care, human services) could also be added to these files to provide a deeper understanding of the interaction of student characteristics, school characteristics, and/or system involvement on academic and behavioral performance.

- *Use early indicators to identify students in the current school population who, absent a school-based intervention, are not likely to graduate.* This research should segment and size the student cohorts that are off track for graduation.
- *Use the identified early indicators to segment the population of dropouts from the cohort into: 1) students who would have been identified by the indicators; and 2) those that would not have been identified by the indicators.* For the students who did not show early signals of dropping out, conduct further analysis of key school-based factors (such as age and credits earned when dropped out and possible others drawn from list above) to gain a better understanding of the types of programming/ services these students would need to stay in or return to school.
- *Determine how students with off-track indicators are distributed throughout schools within the district, and identify schools that are “beating the odds” at getting off-track students and putting them back on track to a high school graduation.*

Respondent Requirements

Each respondent must:

- Have relevant experience conducting quantitative research
- Have published research that stands up to scrutiny and peer review
- Understand the public school system and education data analysis
- Stipulate that the scope of services is understood and accepted
- Be able to provide monthly updates on progress and findings
- Be able to complete the research project within 4-6 months, depending on the state of the data

TOOL 2.2: DESIGNING A DATA ANALYSIS (CONT.)

TRWIB, Inc.

Request for Proposal for Research and Data Analysis cont.

Proposal Content and Evaluation of Proposals

1. Relevant Experience (20 points)

The respondent should:

- a. Provide evidence of previous quantitative research experience, including a work sample.
- b. Provide a list of three client references including name, title, employer, and phone number.
- c. Provide peer reviews or critiques of previous research.

2. Research Team (20 points)

The respondent should:

- a. Identify the specific individuals of the team proposed to conduct the research. Describe the role that each team member will fill.
- b. Provide a resume for each team member who will be working on this project.

3. Estimated Hours, Required Assistance, and Timing (15 points)

The respondent should:

- a. Include a schedule that displays the estimated time in hours for each phase of the research.
- b. Indicate the dates respondent expects to begin and conclude the research
- c. Indicate to what extent the respondent expects assistance from TRWIB, Inc. staff and/or other members of the Multiple Education Pathways Blueprint team.

4. Methodology (30 points)

The respondent should:

- a. Describe the methodology that will be used to evaluate and analyze data. Specifically, respondent should describe how he/she will be able to provide a profile of different types of dropouts in the Pittsburgh Public Schools.
- b. Detail the methodology that will be used to determine early indicators and evaluate their ability to predict future dropouts.

5. Budget (15 points)

The respondent should:

- a. Submit an activity-based budget that itemizes rates for the various activities the respondent will conduct to complete the project.
- b. List additional expenses for which the respondent may request reimbursement during involvement in the project.

TOOL 2.3: ASSESSING YOUR DISTRICT'S CAPACITY TO LAUNCH SCHOOLS FOR OFF-TRACK YOUTH

Directions

Before embarking on either building or contracting for the building of new schools for off-track young people, it is important for leaders to consider the capacity of the district to launch and manage such schools. This tool allows a planning team to address a set of questions designed to assess this capacity. One option is for your team to discuss all the questions together and record the answers in **Tool 2.3, Table 1, Parts A–E**. Another option, if your team is large enough, is to divide the team into three groups, and have each group delve into one area, and then reconvene and compile your answers. Teams should then use the results of **Table 1** to complete **Table 2**, identifying opportunities, barriers, and next steps for each set of questions.

We recommend that the team considering these questions include district leaders who know about district policy and union contracts, as well as those who know about the capacity of community-based organizations to operate schools.



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TOOL 2.3: ASSESSING CAPACITY TO LAUNCH SCHOOLS

Table 1: Assessing Our District’s Capacity / Part A: District Policies	
Questions	In Our District
Which district policies regarding staffing, scheduling, and curriculum create opportunities for new school development for the populations we seek to reach? Which create barriers?	
What possibilities are there for addressing the barriers? For example, is there a history of waivers for new schools? Are there any mechanisms for granting flexibility over these operating conditions?	
Are any of the barriers contractual issues? What is the history of, or potential for, “sidebar” contractual agreements for new schools?	

TOOL 2.3: ASSESSING CAPACITY TO LAUNCH SCHOOLS (CONT.)

Table 1: Assessing Our District's Capacity / Part B: Financing New Models	
Questions	In Our District
What start-up funding (state, local, or foundation) is available for new school development?	
How are existing schools financed: weighted per-pupil funding or allocation of teaching staff and other resources? Does this vary by type of school (i.e., mix of contracts, in-district charters, district schools)?	
What is the mechanism, if any, for contracting with outside school developers?	
What history, if any, is there of braiding funding from other sources, such as the Workforce Investment Act? What possibilities are there for this type of braiding?	

TOOL 2.3: ASSESSING CAPACITY TO LAUNCH SCHOOLS (CONT.)

**Table 1: Assessing Our District’s Capacity / Part C: Building an Infrastructure for School Development:
If District Has an Internal Office of School Development**

Questions	In Our District
How is it organized and staffed, and what services are provided?	
Who are the targets for services?	
Where is the office positioned within the district’s organizational structure?	
What expertise does the office have to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recruit and develop leaders and staff for schools for off-track youth; • identify and/or develop appropriate curricula and assessments; • promote instructional strategies that will be effective with an off-track population; • develop protocols and routines for positive school culture; and • partner with community-based organizations in designing and implementing schools? 	



TOOL 2.3: ASSESSING CAPACITY TO LAUNCH SCHOOLS (CONT.)

Table 1: Assessing Our District’s Capacity / Part D: Building an Infrastructure for School Development: If District Does Not Have an Internal Office of School Development	
Questions	In Our District
Are there outside intermediaries with whom to contract to carry out this work?	
What credibility do these organizations have with the communities and populations to be served by these schools?	
What expertise do these organizations have to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recruit and develop leaders and staff for schools for off-track youth; • identify and/or develop appropriate curricula and assessments; • promote instructional strategies that will be effective with an off-track population; • develop protocols and routines for positive school culture; and • partner with the district in designing and implementing schools? 	
Are there steps the district or another organization can take to help build the capacity (resources, expertise) of outside organizations that have community credibility to carry out this work?	
What experience/expertise does the district have in managing the performance of outside school-development organizations? For example, has the district analyzed the data on existing school designs offered by outside entities to determine if the model is appropriate for, and effective with, target populations identified by the district? Has the district managed contracts to ensure good outcomes with the target population?	

TOOL 2.3: ASSESSING CAPACITY TO LAUNCH SCHOOLS (CONT.)

Table 1: Assessing Our District's Capacity / Part E: Leveraging Existing Models	
Questions	In Our District
What, if any, models within the district have been effective in holding on to underperforming students, educating them to high standards, and ensuring that they graduate?	
Which, if any, of these existing models are effective with students who are significantly over-age/ undercredited?	
Have key practices of these schools been documented? If yes, how accessible is this documentation to others who are interested in using/adapting the designs/practices?	
What mechanisms, if any, are in place to share key instructional, culture-building, and organizational elements in practice in these model schools with other schools in the district?	



TOOL 2.3: ASSESSING CAPACITY TO LAUNCH SCHOOLS (CONT.)

Table 2: Summarizing Opportunities, Barriers, and Next Steps			
	Opportunities	Barriers	Next Steps
<p>District policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staffing • scheduling • curriculum 			
<p>Financing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • start-up funding • financing mechanisms • braided funding 			
<p>Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • internal office for school development with expertise with the off-track population • potential school development/ community organization with credibility and expertise with the off-track population 			
<p>Models</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • models with evidence of effectiveness • mechanisms for sharing practice • mechanisms for training leaders 			

TOOL 2.4: CREATING MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO GRADUATION

As described in the introduction to this chapter, first New York City and then a handful of other cities segmented their off-track population and designed specific options to meet the needs of these subgroups. The most fully realized set of options designed for specific populations can be found in New York City. This tool offers two approaches. The first is New York's overview of its programming options for off-track youth. This is followed by a chart that incorporates emerging knowledge from New York City and other cities on programming models targeted to specific populations of off-track youth.

Review **Table 1** (New York City's options) and **Table 2** (drawn from New York City's Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation materials as well as from the work of the Youth Development Institute in New York City and from data analyses in Boston) with the descriptions of programming models. Then complete **Table 3** on programming in your community. Finally, consider the questions that follow to begin to plan next steps in identifying potential models for development.



photo courtesy of Community College of Baltimore County



TOOL 2.4: CREATING MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO GRADUATION (CONT.)

Table 1: New York City’s Multiple Pathways to Graduation

**Overview of Multiple Pathways to Graduation
School and Programmatic Options**

**Student
Populations**

- Overage and under-credited students currently attending New York City high schools
- Students who have disengaged from the school system and are long term absentees or drop outs

YABC

- Afternoon and evening classes housed in host high schools to serve older students who have been in high school for at least four years and have experienced some academic success (**17 or older, 17+ credits**) but might be considering dropping out or have adult responsibilities that make evening classes a preferable option
- CBO partner provides youth development supports, career and college counseling, and assistance with job placement

**Learning-to-
Work YABC**

- YABC academic model enhanced with an in-depth job readiness, career exploration, and college readiness program designed to help students stay engaged in school by developing the skills they need to complete high school, gain employment, and succeed in post-secondary education
- Students have the opportunity to participate in intensive employability skills development activities such as workshops, seminars, lectures, and field trips
- Paid and unpaid supported internships available to students through participation in the program
- CBO partner provides youth development supports, career and college counseling, assistance with job and internship placement, and work skills development

**Transfer High
School**

- Small, academically rigorous high school for students who have dropped out or are far from making adequate progress in current high school (over age for grade and behind in credits)
- Different age/credit admissions requirements for each school
- Include essential elements of a small school: personalized learning environment; rigorous academic standards; student-centered pedagogy; advisory support to meet instructional and developmental goals; focus on connections to college

TOOL 2.4: CREATING MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO GRADUATION (CONT.)

Table 1: New York City’s Multiple Pathways to Graduation

**Overview of Multiple Pathways to Graduation
School and Programmatic Options**

**Learning-to-
Work Transfer
High School**

- Transfer high school academic model enhanced with youth and academic support services to help students stay engaged, earn a high school diploma, and prepare for success in college
- Program includes in-depth job readiness, career exploration, college readiness, academic tutoring, counseling, and other activities designed to help students develop the skills they need to complete high school, gain employment, and achieve success in post secondary education
- Students have the opportunity to participate in intensive employability skills development and college exploration activities such as workshops, seminars, lectures, and field trips
- Paid and unpaid supported internships available to students through participation in the program
- CBO partner provides youth development supports, career and college counseling, assistance with job and internship placement, and work skills development

**GED &
Related
Blends**

Preparation for Exams for the General Equivalency Degree

- For students who have turned 17 by the last day of the previous school year and have a 9.0 reading level and 7.5 math level (minimum levels required to pass GED)
- Students with reading and math levels two or more years below minimum should be advised that it will take 2-3 years to reach GED passing levels

GED Prep with Learning-to-Work

- Academic model enhanced with youth and academic support services to help students stay engaged in the educational program
- Program includes in-depth job readiness, career exploration, college readiness, academic tutoring, counseling, and other activities designed to help students develop the skills they need to complete high school, gain employment, and achieve success in post secondary education
- Students have the opportunity to participate in intensive employability skills development and college exploration activities such as workshops, seminars, lectures, and field trips
- Paid and unpaid supported internships available to students through participation in the program
- CBO partner provides youth development supports, career and college counseling, assistance with job and internship placement, and work skills development



TOOL 2.4: CREATING MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO GRADUATION (CONT.)

Population	Model
Over-age/off-track students age 16 or older, with enough credits/skill to graduate in three years	Academically rigorous diploma-granting high schools with personalized learning environment, rigorous academic standards, student-centered pedagogy, acceleration strategies for academic catch-up, wraparound support to meet instructional/developmental goals, and clear pathways to college
Over-age English Language Learners who enter the school system during high school	Academically rigorous diploma-granting high schools with intensive remediation and language-acquisition help along with academic and youth development supports in core content areas, extended day and calendar, and connection to internships and college-readiness opportunities
Over-age/off-track students age 17 or older, with enough skills/credits to graduate in one year *	Flexible programming to allow students to make up credits quickly while gaining skills for the transition to postsecondary learning: Interdisciplinary curricula that meet multiple credit requirements and/or self-paced academic work in needed credit areas, wraparound supports to meet instructional/developmental goals, and focus on connections to college
Over-age/off-track students age 17 or older, with few credits/low skills, and an eighth-grade reading level	GED-granting programs with clear pathways/interim benchmarks through community college, featuring intensive literacy across the curriculum, student-centered pedagogy, clear systems for ongoing assessment, pathways to post-secondary training/learning, and in-depth, sector-specific career exploration
Over-age/off-track youth, age 17 or older, with a below-eighth-grade reading level	Pre-GED program with wraparound supports and clear pathways/interim benchmarks toward GED program entry, featuring intensive focus on literacy, student-centered pedagogy, and clear systems for ongoing assessment, coupled with employment-readiness programming and in-depth, sector-specific career exploration

*While many, if not most, seniors are 17 years old and within a year of graduation, analyses in Boston and New York City point to a significant population of 17-year-old seniors who are not likely to graduate with a typical course sequence and instead need a more customized sequence because of missing credits and/or challenging life circumstances.

This chart is adapted from materials created by the Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation, New York City Department of Education; the Boston Public Schools; the Parthenon Group; and the Youth Development Institute.

TOOL 2.4: CREATING MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO GRADUATION (CONT.)

Table 3: Current Programming for Off-Track Youth in Your Community

Brief Description of Model (the model can represent one school/program or several)	Off-track Population(s) Served by Model Please identify the academic profile(s) of the population as well as any other indicators (e.g., pregnant and parenting, court-involved, etc.)	Evidence of Effectiveness, if any

TOOL 2.4: CREATING MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO GRADUATION (CONT.)**Next Steps in Planning Your Portfolio**

1. What data, if any, do you have that segment the off-track population based on academic profile at the district and/or school-programming level? (If you have no or limited data that analyze off-track students according to their academic profiles, you can use **Tool 2.2** to help you design such an analysis and if necessary secure a data partner.)

2. If you have data, what do they tell you about the populations that need recuperative schools/programs?

3. Drawing from the chart you just completed, for which population(s) of youth does your community have schools or programs that are showing evidence of effectiveness? Are these schools or programs serving populations of students based on their academic profiles (see **Table 2**), or on other factors? If other factors, which ones?

4. For which populations do you need additional or more effective models?

5. What immediate steps might you take to...
 - a. Incorporate features of the models described in **Table 2** into current programming?

 - b. Create new options to close the gap for those not well served, drawing on the designs in **Table 2**?

TOOL 2.5: REENTRY INTO THE PIPELINE

This tool is designed to assess a district's policies and practices regarding reentry of youth who have prematurely exited—or stopped out of—high school. It contains five sections:

- I. **Mapping the Options:** Collecting information on all options available and ensuring that youth and families understand those options
- II. **Easing Reentry:** Making sure there are multiple, youth-friendly sites available for youth who want to go back to school, with staff prepared to engage them
- III. **Transition Process:** Assessing returning students' learning needs and preparing schools for reentering youth
- IV. **Transfer/Sharing Records:** Sharing records on credits earned and students' skill levels between external placements and the district
- V. **Tracking Demand and Outcomes:** Collecting data on returning youth and using data inform the district's school-development efforts

Directions

For each section, consider what exists in your community, then identify steps you can take to strengthen your system for reentry of out-of-school youth.



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TOOL 2.5: REENTRY INTO THE PIPELINE (CONT.)**I. Mapping the Options**

Has the district mapped its learning options (schools and programs offering a pathway to a diploma) for returning dropouts?

- Yes
- No

If no, what steps will the district need to take to collect information on all the options—both community-based and district-run—available for returning dropouts?

If yes, what type of information is available about options for returning dropouts?

- Whether the school/program is district-operated or community-based
- Population served in each program
- Primary goals of each program
- Entry/admissions criteria
- Availability of seats

What forms of media are used to communicate this information?

- Guidebook
- Web site
- Other

TOOL 2.5: REENTRY INTO THE PIPELINE (CONT.)

II. Easing Reentry		
Multiple Reentry Points		
How many and what types of locations (e.g., Web-based, community-based, district/school) do you maintain for youth who want to reengage in school?	What steps have been taken to ensure that these are convenient, youth-friendly locations likely to be utilized by out-of-school youth?	What steps could you take to expand sites and make the current sites more youth-friendly?
Communicating and Clarifying Options		
What staff, if any, are responsible for communicating to youth and families seeking reenrollment?	What has the district done to ensure that these staff are knowledgeable about the range of options available and understand the issues facing youth seeking to reenroll?	What steps might the district take to better prepare staff for this responsibility and to increase staff knowledge about options and issues?



TOOL 2.5: REENTRY INTO THE PIPELINE (CONT.)

II. Easing Reentry (cont.)		
Reaching Out to Youth		
What, if any, kind of outreach does the district conduct to tell the community about options for reentry? How often is this done?	What, if any, outreach is specifically targeted to those places (malls, youth centers, etc.) where youth might congregate? How are language issues addressed?	What steps might the district take to improve its outreach in terms of content, frequency, location, and language?
Smoothing Reentry for Youth in Public Care		
What, if any, specific strategies are in place to support the reentry of youth in foster care and those returning from adjudication?	What, if any, partnerships has the district developed with social services and/or juvenile justice to support reentry?	What steps might the district take to ensure that youth in public care make a smooth transition into school?

TOOL 2.5: REENTRY INTO THE PIPELINE (CONT.)

III. Transition Process		
Reassessing Learning Needs		
What kind of process, if any, is there to reassess the learning needs of returning students who may have been out of school for an extended period?	Does the assessment process include a full academic assessment, a reassessment of a student's individual learning plan (IEP), and an assessment of credits earned? Are transcripts readily available? Does it include an assessment of social/emotional needs as well?	What steps could the district take to ensure that the assessment yields complete information about a returning youth's skill and credit levels, and social-emotional needs?
Preparing Schools for Reentering Youth		
What process, if any, is in place to prepare receiving schools for reentering students?	Does this process include close case management for returning students and careful placement in classes suited to academic needs?	What steps can the district take to ensure that schools are prepared and youth are supported through the transition back into school?



TOOL 2.5: REENTRY INTO THE PIPELINE (CONT.)

IV. Transfer/Sharing Records		
Sharing Information with External Providers		
What process, if any, is in place for sharing information with external providers about students' skill levels, previous coursework, and credits?	What are the barriers to complete and timely information-sharing?	What steps can the district take to guarantee that information on students' skill levels, previous coursework, and credits is shared with external providers (e.g., electronic data systems)?
Sharing External Information with District		
Is there a process for external providers to share information about students' skill levels, coursework, and credits with the district if a student returns to a district school?	What are the barriers to complete and timely information-sharing?	What steps (e.g., electronic data sharing) can the district take to establish that information on students' coursework and credits earned in external settings is shared with the district if a student returns?
Credit Transfer		
What is the process for transferring credit earned in external placements, including detention/juvenile justice? Is credit granted centrally through an agreed-on protocol for credit transfer, or is the decision about credit transfer made at individual schools?	What steps have you taken to make certain that students receive credit for coursework completed in external placements?	What steps can the district take to ensure that students receive credit according to an agreed-on protocol?

TOOL 2.5: REENTRY INTO THE PIPELINE (CONT.)

V. Tracking Demand and Outcomes		
Tracking Demand for Options		
What process, if any, is in place for tracking demand for options, including the numbers and academic profile of young people returning to the system?	What steps have you taken to verify that supply meets the demand, including the demand for specific options that meet the profile of returning youth?	What steps might you take to check that data on returning students informs the district's school-development efforts?
Tracking Outcomes of Returning Youth		
What process, if any, is in place to track the outcomes for youth returning to the system?	What steps have you taken to make certain that this data is tracked regularly?	What steps can the district take to ensure that data on outcomes for returning youth are monitored and used to influence systemic practices in serving them?



**IMPROVING
AND SUPPORTING
OPTIONS**

An emerging challenge for school districts and their partners is to ensure that the new and existing school options available to struggling, off-track students and returning dropouts are able to grow, improve, and sustain positive academic and social outcomes for this group of young people. This will require an appropriate balance of accountability and autonomy for these schools and programs, and it will require that oversight, infrastructure, and support systems help these schools overcome the considerable challenges they face.

Youth and parents often speak highly of alternative schools and programs, especially those that are grounded in the community. Students often describe these programs as valuable and transformative: in the best programs, classes are small, the pace of instruction is adjusted as needed, teachers know and care about students, and students are treated respectfully. Some refer to these schools as “life saving,” and say that without this second chance they would likely be “dead or in jail.”

At the same time, these schools are often off the district’s radar screen and suffer from too little systemic attention to equity and quality. More often than not, they are operating under unfavorable conditions: unstable or inequitable financing; assignment of teachers with little regard to their capacity to work with an off-track population; little access to high-quality curriculum or professional development; and even facilities of poor quality. Far from having access to a “system” of options, in most cases, these schools and programs, particularly if they are operated by community-based organizations, have not been connected to the school district in ways that would allow for transparency of data (on student tracking, outcomes, program quality), focused and effective technical assistance, capacity building and scale up, or even widespread recognition and replication of effective practice.

How can districts take advantage of the best of alternative programming, with a steady focus on both quality improvement and expansion, to meet the demand? School districts undertaking efforts on behalf of struggling students and dropouts quickly find themselves faced with a number of key decisions: Where should the office of alternative education/expanded options/multiple pathways sit? How are community-based organizations leveraged to bring their expertise and resources to bear? How can existing alternative high schools—especially those developed before the recent emphasis on high standards—be helped to improve and offer additional academic challenge? What are the systemic challenges to building their capacity?

Both Boston and Portland, Oregon, have integrated their office of alternative education with their office of high schools as a first step toward building capacity and quality. Portland has taken advantage of this realignment to launch a quality review of all programs, incorporate the district’s core curriculum into all programs, and connect alternative programs to professional-development offerings. Through School Quality Reviews, Boston has assessed the quality of alternative schools that are operated under contract by outside vendors, and, in addition to giving feedback to the schools, it is using the results to develop a plan to improve the quality of those schools and address systemic challenges to increasing their capacity.

NOTES ON THE TOOLS

Tool 3.1: Strategies for Organizing Your System of Options

Tool 3.1 presents governance and accountability models from a number of front-runner cities that are building a full and inclusive system of options for all high-school-age youth. The tool first offers a framework for how alternative schools could be organized, taking into consideration the advantages and disadvantages of each. It then provides city-specific examples of the approaches outlined in the framework, including a range of strategies employed by frontrunner cities to improve accountability, quality, and support. Mining these approaches, school and community partners can think through what exists in their community and determine strategies for expanding and improving options for their off-track and out-of-school youth. *Materials in this tool are based on the work of Courtney Collins-Shapiro of the Philadelphia School District, Sheila Venson and Margaret Steinz of the Youth Connection Charter School, and Jenni Villano of the Portland Public Schools.*

Tool 3.2: Profiles of Improved Support and Accountability for Alternatives

Tool 3.2 provides detailed case studies of two of these frontrunner cities, along with guiding questions. These questions and subsequent discussion can help partners to think through the infrastructure that is needed to build and support an accountable, high-quality network of schools and programs. *Materials in this tool are based on the work of Sheila Venson and Margaret Steinz of the Youth Connection Charter School, Jenni Villano of the Portland Public Schools, and Leslie Rennie-Hill, formerly of the Portland Public Schools.*

Tool 3.3: Assessing the Quality and Capacity of Schools for Off-Track Youth

Tool 3.4 focuses on assessing and improving the quality of current programming. It includes a sample rubric for use as the guiding document for a formal school-quality review. It then guides districts and schools through a process of selecting review teams, preparing for and organizing the reviews, and devising recommendations for both the individual school/program and the district itself. *Materials in this tool are based on the work of Kathi Mullin and Larry Myatt of the Boston Public Schools.*

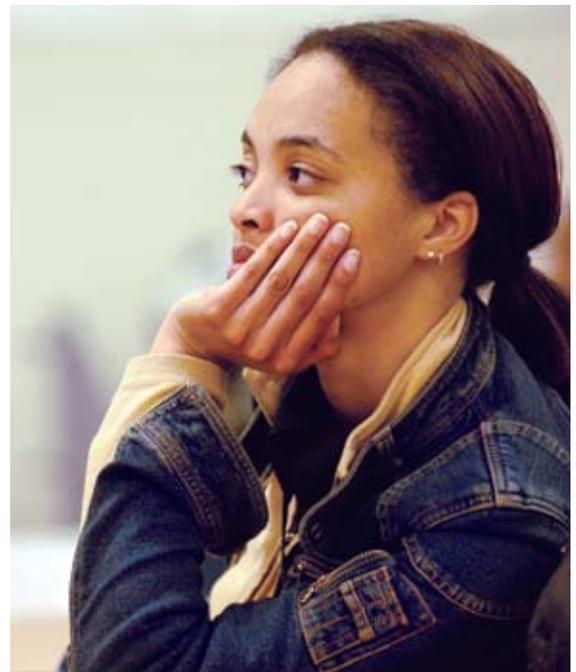
TOOL 3.1: STRATEGIES FOR ORGANIZING YOUR SYSTEM OF OPTIONS

Directions

With your team, review **Tool 3.1A: Framework for Organizing Options**. Once your team has reviewed the framework, turn to **Tool 3.1B**, which provides city-specific examples of the approaches outlined in it. The city charts present a range of strategies exercised by frontrunner cities to improve the supply, quality, and oversight of options for off-track and out-of-school youth.

Drawing on the city charts, use **Tool 3.1C: Assessing What Exists in Our Community** to examine the strategies for developing leadership, providing instructional and curriculum support, aligning funding streams, and building partnerships for alternative programming that are currently in place in your community.

Finally, turn to **Tool 3.1D: Strategies for Improving Quantity and Quality of Programming in Our Community**. To complete this tool, consider the range and diversity of activities described in the city chart, mixing and matching strategies that seem most useful for expanding and strengthening schools for off-track and out-of-school youth in your community.



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TOOL 3.1A: FRAMEWORK FOR ORGANIZING OPTIONS

Inside Approach

District funds, supports, and provides oversight for alternative schools as part of an overall portfolio. In this approach, the school system develops and supports internal options (e.g., school-within-school programs; small schools explicitly designed to serve youth who are off track for graduation). The district may also contract with outside providers to develop and operate options (as in Philadelphia). Regardless of what entity develops and operates the programs, all are considered part of the district's portfolio of options. Both district-run and contracted programs have access to the same professional development, managerial, and leadership-development opportunities offered to other high schools within the district. In addition, the principals and directors leading the alternative schools are involved in informing systemwide initiatives, such as core-curriculum efforts or changes in graduation requirements. Finally, with this approach, districts often conduct or contract for evaluations or quality reviews of the schools or programs in order to guide a school-improvement process.

Key conditions needed to support the approach: School system committed to improving outcomes for off-track populations; a dedicated high school reform office within the district with entrepreneurial staff; an adequate supply of options or capacity to develop and support new options for struggling students and dropouts.

Outside Approach

A Charter Management Organization develops, supports, and provides oversight and accountability for alternative schools. This approach uses an outside Charter Management organization (CMO) to develop, grow, and support a network of alternative schools. This organization may grow from an already established local school-development entity or be newly created and staffed "from the ground up." Once in operation and in receipt of a state charter, the CMO can provide fiscal and administrative support for a group of alternative programs that operate as charter schools (as in Chicago). These schools may be entirely new operations or existing programs that are being reconstituted or converted to diploma-granting entities. The CMO provides oversight and support, developing and managing an ongoing accountability system and providing a range of technical support.

Key conditions needed to support the approach: Strong, effective state charter legislation; local school-development capacity; entrepreneurial staff with school development expertise and in fundraising to support and sustain the CMO.

Blended Approach

Outside partners form a network; the network works with the district on all aspects of support and oversight. In this approach, an outside network is formed to provide support and advocacy for community-based, alternative education, and/or GED programs in the city or locality. In some communities, this work has positioned the network to become part of the school's overall high school portfolio (Portland, Oregon), thereby opening up opportunities for improved technical and professional support. Networks that exist as independent entities can advocate for the youth they serve and for the overall value of their programming. Networks can also share resources and referrals, craft joint professional development offerings, and collaboratively raise funds for various school improvement ventures.

Key conditions needed to support the approach: Enough programs with some track record of quality and sustainability; entrepreneurial CBO or program directors who can develop and sustain a network model; outside programs that are open to and see the value of a continual improvement model and some transparency with relation to their practices and outcomes; local school district committed to serving this population; inside advocates who are knowledgeable about the CBO system.

TOOL 3.1B: INSIDE APPROACH—SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

What approach is used to develop/organize options?	What policies and funding enable development of education options?	What policy and supports give direction on curriculum and assessment?	How do schools/programs access relevant professional-development services?
<p>School District of Philadelphia (SDP) employs a diverse-provider model. Contracted schools are considered part of district but are run by for-profit and nonprofit providers.</p> <p>These Accelerated Schools serve youth 16 and up who have 0–8 credits.</p> <p>School system also funds education options (EOP) programs (formerly Twilight Schools) for credit recovery for older youth. The city also has a Gateway to College (Early College) program with the Community College of Philadelphia.</p>	<p>School system dollars and grant dollars fund Accelerated Schools and Education-Options programs.</p> <p>CBOs helped design RFP for Accelerated Schools.</p> <p>City uses WIA funds to provide wraparound services for students in Accelerated Schools.</p>	<p>Programs must base instruction on the district’s core curriculum and align courses to state assessments.</p> <p>Schools have flexibility to customize curricula to meet student needs.</p> <p>Programs vary in instructional approaches. Many use software for credit recovery or skill development. As of 2009–10, contracted schools will use common set of instructional approaches.</p> <p>District is exploring the use of proficiency-based advancement, which would enable competency-based programming.</p> <p>District has created curriculum modules focusing less on seat time and more on mastery, to be piloted in EOP and Accelerated Schools in fall 2008. Exploring use of the modules in state juvenile justice facilities for credit alignment upon return.</p>	<p>District provides limited professional development, mostly through the system’s designated professional-development days. A PD stream just for Accelerated providers is in planning for FY 09.</p> <p>Center for Literacy developed literacy toolkit for EOP and GED programs and provides literacy training for teachers in EOP programs.</p> <p>Schools can determine own professional-development needs, and funds are built into budgets.</p>
How are leaders identified and supported?	What organization provides oversight for alternatives? What partnerships provide key support?	What systems are in place to ensure quality, accountability, and adequate supply?	
<p>Sites recruit and hire principals according to specifications stipulated in the contract with the school district.</p> <p>Philadelphia Youth Network (youth-based intermediary) convenes leaders of Accelerated Schools and is exploring some shared PD for staff and/or principals in conjunction with the district.</p> <p>SDP Chief Academic Officer and Director of Multiple Pathways convene principals monthly for primarily administrative issues.</p>	<p>Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (OMPG) is part of the Office of High Schools and oversees Alternative Education.</p> <p>Philadelphia Youth Network partners with OMPG on policy development, funding, research, and program development. PYN assists with all issues related to the development of full portfolio of options.</p> <p>PYN hosts Project U-Turn, a cross-sector collaborative (as an outgrowth of the original YTFG work) that conducts research and advocacy regarding struggling students and out-of-school youth and coordinates programming for returning youth.</p>	<p>Accelerated Schools use same system of data reporting and management as other SDP schools.</p> <p>Agencies supported by the OMPG agree to certain contracted outcomes.</p> <p>OMPG and PYN have contracted for a third-party evaluation, which will compare student performance before and after placement in Accelerated Schools and will inform improvement priorities and school support needs.</p>	

TOOL 3.1B: OUTSIDE APPROACH—CHICAGO’S YOUTH CONNECTION CHARTER SCHOOL*

What approach is used to develop/organize options?	What policies and funding enable development of education options?	What policy and supports give direction on curriculum and assessment?	How do schools/programs access relevant professional-development services?
<p>City has a Charter Management Organization—Youth Connection Charter School (YCCS)—that provides oversight for a network of 22 alternative education campuses that deliberately target dropouts and “at-risk” youth.</p> <p>YCCS has grown from serving 1,000 youth to serving 3,000 youth (school size has increased).</p> <p>Chicago Public Schools District 299 also operates a range of noncharter programs for off-track youth.</p>	<p>State charter legislation provides vehicle for these schools.</p> <p>School district contributes \$7,000 per student, and the YCCS system leverages \$2,000 to \$4,000 per student from outside sources (e.g., Dept. of Children/ Family Services, DOL/WIA).</p> <p>Contracted vendors (community-based organizations) deliver educational services for at-risk youth through YCCS.</p> <p>The administrative share of public dollars (10% over the past five years) supports the central YCCS operation.</p>	<p>Contracted vendors develop curricula, using centralized key elements and principles, and common frameworks. Main tenets are emphasis on basics, relevant and student-centered learning, active engagement. All curricula incorporate state learning standards.</p> <p>Some contracted vendors are private, others are nonprofits. Many of the 22 vendor campuses are GED programs that have been restructured as YCCS diploma-granting institutions under the YCCS charter school umbrella. Since 1998, nearly 8,000 YCCS diplomas have been earned by graduates from the campuses.</p>	<p>YCCS provides professional development for teachers. PD is focused on improving student learning.</p> <p>Charter Management Organization is building faculty capacity to look critically at teacher work. YCCS facilitates common planning time, involves teachers in governance and performance-based assessment practices, and recognizes exemplary staff.</p>
How are leaders identified and supported?	What organization provides oversight for alternatives? What partnerships provide key support?	What systems are in place to ensure quality, accountability, and adequate supply?	
<p>YCCS supports principals as instructional leaders. Assistance focuses on capacity building for school improvement, such as strategies to analyze data.</p> <p>YCCS encourages leaders/staff to build more flexible programming around the needs and potential of youth.</p> <p>YCCS encourages leaders and staff to use policy flexibilities to redesign schools so they better meet the needs and potential of youth, such as through competency or standards-based system.</p>	<p>YCCS provides fiscal support, student records, and development and oversight of standard policies and procedures. YCCS has developed a system for collection of student data.</p> <p>YCCS ensures that schools teach essential skills and follow state standards across all campuses.</p> <p>YCCS works in partnership with CPS and a variety of human-service agencies and universities.</p>	<p>With institution of a common data system, schools are now held accountable for same outcomes as all charters in state.</p> <p>Programs count reading/math gains and attendance; YCCS added retention as a key data element. YCCS is in the process of adding fiscal reporting and operational indicators (e.g., numbers of highly qualified teachers, staff turnover, support from governance structures).</p> <p>Since 1998, five programs have been cut because of lack of performance.</p>	

*The Chicago Public Schools operates schools and programs for off-track and out-of-school youth as well.

TOOL 3.1B: BLENDED APPROACH—PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

What approach is used to develop/organize options?	What policies and funding enable development of education options?	What policy and supports give direction on curriculum and assessment?	How do schools/programs access relevant professional-development services?
<p>School system contracts with outside community-based education providers, which are organized into a provider network.</p> <p>School system also operates in-district alternatives.</p> <p>Some alternatives serve specialized populations—teen parents, homeless youth, and youth returning from juvenile-justice system.</p>	<p>Oregon school districts are required by statute to maintain learning alternatives for students who are not achieving in traditional school environments. Options must be flexible with regard to environment, time, structure, and pedagogy.</p> <p>By statute, 80% of state per-pupil dollars follow students to outside providers, with school system retaining 20% for admin. costs.</p> <p>Community-based programs supplement ADA funding with additional private, city, and federal dollars (e.g., WIA).</p>	<p>High school diploma-granting programs are responsible for delivering core Portland Public Schools (PPS) curriculum aligned to state standards.</p> <p>Alternative providers are advising PPS on pedagogies and credit attainment/recovery methodologies (e.g., credit for proficiency) needed for alternative programs as district implements core curriculum for all high schools.</p>	<p>Alternative network members meet monthly and devote some meeting time to professional development.</p> <p>Network uses standing professional-development committee to determine PD priorities and use of the 3 days that PPS sets aside for professional development for all high schools, including those operated by community-based organizations.</p> <p>Current focus is on effective instructional strategies.</p>
How are leaders identified and supported?	What organization provides oversight for alternatives? What partnerships provide key support?	What systems are in place to ensure quality, accountability, and adequate supply?	
<p>PPS, in collaboration with CBOs, hired a manager to provide mentorship and direct support to CBO leaders.</p> <p>Outside schools/programs are invited and included in all leadership forums provided by the school district. Leaders are involved in shaping and giving input into relevant high school reform work.</p>	<p>Providers network positioned programs to become part of the school system’s portfolio of high schools.</p> <p>PPS Office of Education Options now part of office of high schools (OHS). Office of Education Options has oversight for contracting, evaluation and improvement of alternative programs, and launching new options.</p> <p>Two outside programs have partnered with Portland high schools and offer intervention services (e.g., support for incoming ninth graders, academic tutoring).</p> <p>Partners work with district to identify, contact, and reengage early leavers throughout the school year.</p> <p>Office of High Schools contracted with outside firm for independent evaluation of alt. ed. programs.</p>	<p>Office of Ed. Options specifies annual performance objectives that drive school-improvement planning for all CBO-directed programs in the city.</p> <p>Each provider has a contract for a number of “slots.” If slots are not filled, then district reallocates funds to ensure students are served.</p>	

TOOL 3.1C: ASSESSING WHAT EXISTS IN OUR COMMUNITY

<p>How are your current alternative-education options organized? Of the three approaches—inside, outside, or blended—which one best describes what exists in your community?</p>	
<p>What policies and funding enable and support current alternative-education options in your community?</p>	
<p>What policy and supports give direction on curriculum and assessment?</p>	
<p>How do alternative schools/ programs access relevant professional development services?</p>	
<p>How are leaders identified and supported?</p>	
<p>What organization provides oversight for alternatives? What partnerships provide key support?</p>	
<p>What systems are in place to ensure quality, accountability, and adequate supply?</p>	

TOOL 3.1D: STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMMING IN OUR COMMUNITY

<p>How will you adapt/improve your current approach for developing and organizing alternative options? Which of the three approaches—Inside, Outside, Blended—will you adopt?</p>	
<p>What policies and funding can you leverage or put in place to enable development of education options?</p>	
<p>What new or additional policies and supports will give direction on curriculum and assessment?</p>	
<p>What steps will you take to improve schools'/ programs' access to relevant professional-development services?</p>	
<p>How will leaders be identified and supported?</p>	
<p>What organization provides oversight for alternatives? If it's the current organization, how might you improve its effectiveness? What new or additional partnerships will you put into place?</p>	
<p>How will you improve the systems that are in place for ensuring quality, accountability and adequate supply?</p>	

TOOL 3.2: PROFILES OF IMPROVED SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ALTERNATIVES

Building on the charts in **Tool 3.1**, the profiles on pages 85–88 dig deeper into how two communities use different approaches to expand and improve their alternative-education options. They show how districts and/or their partners have improved accountability and support for alternative-education programs in order to improve the quality and outcomes of these options and, over time, grow the supply of programming to better meet the actual need.

As you read through each of the profiles, consider the questions outlined in the first column in **Tool 3.2A: Learning from the City's Experiences**. When you have finished reading, return to **Tool 3.2A** and discuss and answer the questions. Next, turn to and complete **Tool 3.2B: Adapting the Lessons for Our Community** and discuss how you might apply the lessons from the profile to your community in order to expand and improve your alternative education options.



TOOL 3.2A: LEARNING FROM THE CITY’S EXPERIENCES

Key Question	Portland	Chicago
<p>What are the key strengths and trade-offs in this city’s approach? For example, regarding alternative education’s relationship with the district, leadership, and quality control?</p>		
<p>What are the main issues the city is struggling with? What strategies are leaders using to address these challenges?</p>		
<p>How has this city taken advantage of local/state conditions to develop an effective approach to expanding and improving alternative education options?</p>		

TOOL 3.2B: ADAPTING THE LESSONS FOR OUR COMMUNITY

1. What challenges/issues are common to both cities? What can you learn from the strategies they use to address/resolve these issues?
2. Given the strengths and trade-offs in each city's approach, what aspects of their models are most applicable to your local conditions?
3. How might your city adapt strategies used by these two cities to expand and improve alternative education options in your community?

TOOL 3.2B: ADAPTING THE LESSONS FOR OUR COMMUNITY (CONT.)**Portland, Oregon**

This profile illustrates how a network of community-based alternative-education programs built visibility for their programming, strengthened their practices and outcomes, and ultimately demonstrated the “value add” of their programming to a school system. With new leadership at the district, the network’s efforts resulted in their becoming fully incorporated into the school system’s overall portfolio of high school options.

Historical Context

Portland is renowned among American cities for its work in developing alternative programming for struggling students and dropouts, enabling these youth to return to and/or successfully complete high school. This vigorous programming is substantially enabled by innovative state legislation that explicitly requires all districts to provide alternative-learning environments for young people who do not flourish in traditional schools. School districts must establish alternative-education options either within their systems or through contracts with outside providers. Money follows the students into these programs through an 80/20 formula (school system retains 20 percent for reenrollment processing; 80 percent goes directly to programs to cover the education and support needs of participants).

A Growing Partnership Between a Network of Community-based Programs and the School District

As in many other cities, alternative schools were historically seen as marginalized enterprises in Portland. Portland’s providers decided they needed to articulate and address this issue directly. In 2000, an entrepreneurial group of program directors came together and formed a peer-led network. The key activities of the network were to explore ways to document the quality of programs, develop and provide support for a continual improvement model, and then gather reliable evidence that could demonstrate the value of their programming to the Portland school system.

This network—known as the Coalition of Metropolitan Area Community-based Schools (CMAC)—is comprised of 19 community-based programs. They include high school diploma-granting, GED, and community college programs. Some local programs also serve specialized populations, such as homeless youth, teen parents, and children of recent immigrants. Once CMAC was firmly established, members secured funding for a third-party evaluation of the community-based alternative programs. The evaluation was designed to provide formative data to raise the visibility of this programming for city and school district policymakers. Once the evaluation was under way, CMAC began to work on improving data collection and providing more professional development for schools and programs in the network.

Over time, the information was effective in helping the network position itself to advocate for greater support from the school system. With support from the school system, CMAC began to use more consistent and accessible data to demonstrate that a stronger partnership would help the city recover its dropouts and ultimately raise graduation rates. The evaluation findings served as the basis for a set of powerful graphics that proved these very points.

TOOL 3.2B: ADAPTING THE LESSONS FOR OUR COMMUNITY (CONT.)**Portland, Oregon (cont.)**

The graphics showed that retention and graduation rates of the community-based programs did indeed lower school dropout and raise the district's graduation rates. In fact, 2003–04 data illustrate that without the external programs, Portland Public Schools' (PPS) dropout rates would increase from 5.10 percent annually to 7.25 percent.

Data also revealed that programs had better outcomes with youth if they recruited “near dropouts” coming right out of high school (as opposed to having been out of school for an extended period of time). These data made the case for a closer partnership between the school system and outside providers so that youth didn't fall through the cracks of a fragmented delivery system. With these compelling data in hand, the network made a series of formal presentations to school leaders. At about this same time, the school system hired a new superintendent with a special interest in high school reform.

The timing was right for a new approach. As a first step, the superintendent brought the leader of CMAC (also the executive director of the well-regarded and community-based Open Meadow Alternative Schools) into the system as director of the Office of Educational Options, with oversight of a large portfolio of education options.

The superintendent moved the Office of Education Options into the Office of High Schools, thereby consolidating infrastructure and leadership for high school reform within the district. After this move, PPS took additional steps to make the full inclusion of alternative schools within the system's portfolio an operational reality. The Office of Education Options launched a recontracting process for the external programs that increased accountability and also supported a new evaluation that showed improved numbers on holding power and graduation rates. Later, OHS launched a school-quality review of all programs in order to identify and document priorities for school improvement.

The system also began to connect the alternative-education programs to all PPS professional-development offerings. This enabled alternative-education directors to be involved in ongoing leadership development with peers in the school system and to participate as partners in all new and ongoing system-sponsored initiatives. It also enabled teachers to more easily access professional-development offerings and get direct support for instructional improvement.

Currently, community-based directors are involved with school district colleagues in rolling out a new core curriculum for all high schools and alternative schools. Community-based leaders are directly involved with peers in deciding how best to involve and support their teachers so that staff can respond to new content and delivery demands. They are also utilized as peer consultants to help the system learn from their pedagogies and strategies, such as granting credit for proficiency (rather than for seat time).

Most recently, the PPS has contracted with the Bridgespan Group for data analysis that will help to further reveal needs for system development. The study will serve as a launching pad for the transformation of the city's secondary-school system, incorporating all high schools and alternative schools.

TOOL 3.2B: ADAPTING THE LESSONS FOR OUR COMMUNITY (CONT.)**Chicago, Illinois**

This profile presents the story of how a charter-management organization oversees the majority of diploma-granting schools serving off-track and out-of-school youth in one city. The case also describes how this centralized Charter Management Organization has led the reconstitution of a set of GED programs for diploma-granting entities while working to improve both program quality and scale.

Description of Model/Approach

The mission of Youth Connection Charter School (YCCS) is to provide quality education opportunities targeting at-risk students and high school dropouts. YCCS, an umbrella organization, contracts with 22 vendor campuses that now serve nearly 3,000 students per year. Under charter legislation, the school district provides approximately \$7,000 per student per year. YCCS leverages an additional \$2,000 to \$4,000 per student per year from government and/or private sources. Since YCCS's inception, more than 8,000 youths have earned a high school diploma through its programs.

History/Context

Illinois's state charter legislation, passed in 1996, is designed to promote new education options within the public system, improve learning, encourage new teaching methods, and open up new learning opportunities, especially for struggling students.

In 1997, YCCS applied for and received a charter to set up alternative-education services for "at-risk" youth. With receipt of its charter, YCCS reached out to current providers of alternative-education services. Most programs at the time were small, Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA)-funded enterprises, many offering only the GED. YCCS began to build relationships with the programs and ascertain their interest in converting to diploma-granting charter-school campuses. Conversion to charter status would give programs a much improved and sustainable funding source. As added incentive, YCCS offered campuses technical support for conversion and facilities upgrades and help with fiscal and administrative operations.

As a result, YCCS has functioned for the past several years as the umbrella for a network of contracted campuses that now provide an essential skills-based curriculum that leads to a YCCS diploma for struggling students and dropouts. As a first step in building this capacity, YCCS developed a contracting process that would yield a group of education providers committed to constituting or reconstituting their programs as diploma-granting campuses under the YCCS charter. Once the contracted vendor campuses were in place, YCCS provided a common set of essential skills aligned with state standards and "back office" support—fiscal management, student-record information, and development and oversight of standard policies and procedures for the contracted schools. YCCS also provided coordinated support in working with the Chicago Public Schools, as well as help in developing and brokering partnerships with a variety of human-service agencies, businesses, community colleges, and universities. YCCS's varied operations are supported by the administrative share (10 percent) of state charter dollars, as well as with additional funding from private sources.

TOOL 3.2B: ADAPTING THE LESSONS FOR OUR COMMUNITY (CONT.)**Chicago, Illinois (cont.)****Work of the Charter Organization to Improve Quality and Outcomes**

To support programs in making the transition from GED- to diploma-granting entities, YCCS provided technical assistance on program design and curriculum development. All schools now develop their own unique curriculum, based on a common set of essential skills and state standards. The schools place a common emphasis on relevant and self-directed learning, individualized instruction, and active student engagement. Programs also make wide use of experiential learning methods, including student-run enterprises, peer tutoring, and student-produced publications.

As contracted campuses got up and running under charter management, YCCS developed a common data system and began to move programs from the performance measures they had reported under JTPA to school-performance measures required under state charter-school legislation. YCCS next mounted a full-scale professional-development effort, supporting school leaders in becoming instructional leaders, fluent in the use of data and effective in helping teachers make data-driven decisions, including looking at student work and using performance-based assessment practices.

An increasing focus on outcomes and accountability in recent years has resulted in the closing of a number of vendor campuses. Those vendor campuses remaining under YCCS have grown, so that each has reached a scale of operations considered sustainable by YCCS. Overall capacity has also grown: the contracted education providers now serve 3,000 young people a year (up from 1,000 in the first years of operation). While this growth is heartening, the YCCS campuses have waiting lists that range from 800 to 1,200 students at any given time.

Current Work and Challenges

The work of growing and supporting a quality charter-school operation for this population is challenging and absorbing. YCCS staff say that quality and accountability are ongoing challenges, and they describe the recent move to close out contracts with underperforming campuses of the school as controversial within the larger community. Still, the home organization has tried to keep a consistent focus on raising the quality of these campuses and helping them design creative and effective programming that meets the needs and potential of the students they serve.

Currently, school leaders and staff are involved in a school-redesign initiative that encourages them to take a deep look at their vendor campuses to ascertain what's working and what's not. School leaders are urged to take a bold school-improvement approach, working from a set of common design principles articulated by YCCS. YCCS is supporting campus leaders in moving beyond restrictive ways of thinking about schooling, using the operating and policy flexibilities they enjoy to push the envelope with regard to new school designs. Understanding that the "skills gap" is more important for future work and life than the "credit gap," staff focus on the issue of moving from a strictly seat-time and credit-recovery approach to one that emphasizes skill development and the demonstration of key competencies that move young people more dramatically toward work and college-ready standards.

TOOL 3.3: ASSESSING THE QUALITY AND CAPACITY OF SCHOOLS FOR OFF-TRACK YOUTH

A School Quality Review (SQR) is a process that enables a district and its partners to assess both district-operated and contracted schools or programs based on a set of benchmarks of quality and capacity. School Quality Reviews can serve several functions:

- Inform a school district about the capacity and quality of alternative schools (contracted and in-district) within their portfolio
- Provide evidence-based feedback to a school or set of schools on their strengths and need for improvement
- Offer specific recommendations to guide improvement in individual schools and programs
- Offer specific recommendations on how a district can support and strengthen the quality and capacity of schools for better outcomes

The School Quality Review process has three steps:

STEP 1: A self-assessment by the school, using the SQR tool, on school strengths, challenges, and areas needing improvement.

STEP 2: An assessment conducted by an external team, on school strengths, challenges, and areas needing improvement. This team reviews the results from the school's internal review, and then conducts its own review, using the same SQR tool. It visits the school for interviews and focus groups with school staff, students, and stakeholders.

STEP 3: Development of a set of recommendations by the external team that identifies what both the school and the district need to do to build quality and capacity.

An individual school or network of schools can also use the School Quality Review assessment tool to conduct internal reviews of programming to guide professional development and capacity building.

This tool has five sections:

- A School Quality Review Assessment Tool (**Tool 3.3A**)
- A tool to guide selection of internal and external teams (**Tools 3.3B, 3.3C**)
- A tool to help a school conduct a self-study using the SQR tool (**Tool 3.3D**)
- A tool to guide development of an agenda for the external review team's site visit and identification of artifacts to convey the school's work to the team (**Tool 3.3E**)
- A tool to guide development of a final report (**Tool 3.3F**)

TOOL 3.3: ASSESSING THE QUALITY AND CAPACITY OF SCHOOLS FOR OFF-TRACK YOUTH (CONT.)

Directions

School Self-Assessment Team

First, school representatives should review **Tool 3.3A: School Quality Review Assessment Tool**, so that everyone is familiar with the topics to be considered and the benchmarks of quality in the overall School Quality Review process.

Second, use **Tool 3.3B: SQR Team Selection: School Team for Self-Assessment** to select the team that will conduct the self-assessment.

Third, use **Tool 3.3D: Conducting a Self-Study** to design and conduct your internal review before the external-review-team visit.

Fourth, use **Tool 3.3E: Conveying a School's Work to an External Team** to determine the agenda for the review-team visit and to identify the artifacts you will use to convey the school's work.

External Review Team

First, district representatives should review **Tool 3.3A: School Quality Review Assessment Tool**, so that everyone is familiar with the topics to be considered and the benchmarks of quality in the overall School Quality Review process.

Second, use **Tool 3.3C: SQR Team Selection: External Review Team** to select the team that will conduct the external review.

Third, review the school's completed **School Quality Review Assessment (Tool 3.3A)**. Then conduct your own review, using the same SQR tool, through a visit to the school for interviews and focus groups with school staff, students, and stakeholders (such as parents, community partners, and advisory board members) and for review and discussion of selected school artifacts (see **Tool 3.3C**).

Finally, use **Tool 3.3F: Developing a Final Report** as a guide to summarizing findings from the review, both for the district and for the school itself, to improve quality and capacity.

TOOL 3.3A: SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW ASSESSMENT TOOL

Directions

For each of the 15 areas comprising the SQR tool, determine the extent to which the school has put in place the core feature (in gray) by assessing whether it has met each of the bulleted benchmarks for that area. Use the tool to record evidence of the benchmarks including promising practices and areas of concern. After you have examined the evidence, rate the school in that area using a four-point rating scale:

1. Little to no development
2. In active development
3. Well-developed
4. Fully implemented and sustainable

Once you have assessed all the areas, turn to the chart at the end of the tool: *Summing It Up: The Next Steps*. Drawing on the completed School Quality Review Assessment Tool, summarize the promising practices and areas of concern and then identify possible next steps for the district and the school.

<p>I. Mission and Vision: School has a well-developed mission and vision that are shared and integrated across school’s activities and operations</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision/mission are included in all written or Web-based materials. • Staff, students, parents, and community members understand and can articulate the vision/mission and understand the unique aspects of the program. • Structures of the school day support the achievement of the school’s mission and vision. 	
<p>II. Outreach/Recruitment/Orientation: School has a clear and transparent outreach, intake, and orientation process to ensure smooth entry of students into school</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach mechanisms provide timely information to potential students about offerings of the school, and process for entry is transparent and equitable. • School’s intake process is designed to determine whether school can meet the student’s needs. • School gets timely and adequate documentation from previous schools/programs. • School has formal and consistent orientation processes for students and parents to help them understand the school’s mission, practices, and unique aspects. 	

TOOL 3.3A: SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW ASSESSMENT TOOL (CONT.)

<p>III. Governance: School has well-defined and transparent governance structures</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New members of the governance and management teams are oriented and supported in a timely fashion. • Staff, students, and families understand processes for bringing issues for resolution to the governance or leadership of the school. • Leadership has formal mechanisms to involve stakeholders in and communicate about key decisions that impact the school. 	
<p>IV. Leadership: School leadership demonstrates strong and consistent management, instructional leadership, and organization skills</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School has leaders who are representative of the community and with the relevant experience and credentials to support the school’s vision and mission. • The school’s leadership models the school’s vision and mission and keeps instructional quality at the center of the school’s priorities. • School leaders have the authority and expertise to hire quality teachers and staff and supervise all staff. • Leadership is active in fundraising to support school’s goals. 	
<p>V. Operations: School has operational processes that support effective teaching and learning and promote improved outcomes for young people</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School has clear process for hiring, and criteria for staff selection and formal job descriptions that are aligned to the school’s vision and mission. • Structures of school promote an orderly and focused environment and provide personalized learning and strong adult-youth and peer-to-peer relationships. • Funds are aligned with the school’s mission and improvement priorities. • The facility is clean and well organized, with appropriate space to meet the school’s needs. • Staff are paid equitably. 	

TOOL 3.3A: SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW ASSESSMENT TOOL (CONT.)

<p>VI. Standards: School has set high standards for student learning that are articulated throughout the school</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School has clearly articulated and high standards for what students should know and be able to do to progress and earn a credential. • Students understand and can articulate these standards and what they need to do to achieve them. • High standards and expectation are clearly visible in both student work and teacher assignments. 	
<p>VII. Curriculum: School curriculum promotes acceleration to college-ready graduation</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has adopted an evidence-based schoolwide literacy approach. Effective literacy-development efforts are apparent across content areas. • The school has adopted an evidence-based schoolwide approach to teaching math. Effective practices (e.g., reading charts and graphs, solving mathematical problems) are in evidence across content areas. • Curriculum is relevant and engaging and connects learning experiences to the community and cultural lives of students. • Curriculum is documented as it is developed and archived for use and adaptation. 	
<p>VIII. Assessment: Assessment mechanisms are transparent and use multiple measures</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student learning is regularly assessed using multiple measures (state assessments, standardized or classroom-based tests, performance-based assessments, portfolios, etc.) • Rubrics outlining assessment criteria are developed and shared with students and parents. • Student progress toward graduation and postsecondary readiness is regularly captured and reported to students and parents. 	

TOOL 3.3A: SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW ASSESSMENT TOOL (CONT.)

<p>IX. Data-driven Decision Making: School uses data strategically to drive improvement</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has a process for collecting and analyzing student performance and outcome data including a process to examine data using multiple measures (race, gender, etc.). • The school uses the data to implement annual plans to improve student achievement. • Assessment data are used to improve teaching and learning in the school. • The school closely tracks outcomes for off-track or out-of-school youth in areas of retention, attendance, achievement, graduation, and post-program outcomes. 	
<p>X. Instruction: Effective, diverse instruction is evident in all classrooms</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers use effective lesson designs that differentiate instruction, engage students, and maximize instructional time. • Varied, flexible approaches are evident in classrooms, including adaptation of styles and pace, use of interdisciplinary connections or units, inquiry or project-based learning, independent or self-directed study, integrated literacy, and critical thinking or study skills. • Opportunities exist for students to apply their learning to real life problems or experiences. • Students have a variety of opportunities (tutoring, double-block instruction, small-group work, software programming, study skills integrated with content) to succeed in core subjects and recover credits when needed. • Students use computers and other electronic technologies regularly for research and for preparing, organizing, and revising their work. 	

TOOL 3.3A: SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW ASSESSMENT TOOL (CONT.)

<p>XI. Professional Development: The school has clear processes to support every individual's professional development</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual professional-development plans are aligned with the improvement priorities of the school. • Every staff member has a personal professional-growth plan that is informed by supervision and evaluation. • New staff receive coaching and mentoring from experienced staff, an instructional team, or the school leader. • School has collaborative structures (team teaching, peer supervision, classroom observations, looking at student work) that allow staff to form a professional learning culture and continually improve practice. • School has a formal and regular feedback process. Feedback is timely and helps staff improve practice. 	
<p>XII. School Culture and Climate and Family/Community Involvement</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school provides a safe environment for learning. • The school is always welcoming, nurturing, and reflective of youths' cultures and interests. • The school is physically accessible to all students and parents. • The school has explicit structures and rituals to enable staff, students, and peers to know each other well and support each other's learning. • Students and families have clearly defined, meaningful opportunities to be actively involved in the life of the school. 	
<p>XIII. Equity: All students have equal access to high-quality learning opportunities</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students from all races, classes, cultures, and genders take a common core of courses that lead to college readiness. • Data on student performance indicate no significant achievement gap between students of different races, classes, cultures, and genders. 	

TOOL 3.3A: SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW ASSESSMENT TOOL (CONT.)

<p>XIV. Student Support: Students receive personalized support to graduate college ready</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students have individual educational plans that guide their experiences while in the school. • All students participate in individual counseling and advisories to support their engagement in school and progress toward graduation. • Procedures exist to identify young people’s assets and support needs and connect them to outside resources to access both additional support and enrichment. • Strong partnerships exist to help provide academic and support services, enrichment, and transition experiences for youths. • The school reaches out to parents, guardians or other significant adults when necessary to support students. 	
<p>XV. Transitions to Adulthood</p> <p>Overall Ranking for this Area: <input type="text"/></p>	<p>Evidence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are clear transition processes that include exposure to education and career options and students have consistent guidance and assistance in transitioning to life after high school. • Partnerships with postsecondary institutions offer opportunities for youths to try out college courses (i.e., for dual credit) and have other on-campus college experiences. • The school provides some follow-up services to students for up to six months after they leave the program, and keeps track of their progress. 	

TOOL 3.3A: SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW ASSESSMENT TOOL (CONT.)

Summing It Up: The Next Steps				
Area	Promising Practices	Areas of Concern	Next Steps for District	Next Steps for School
Mission/Vision				
Outreach, Recruitment, Orientation				
Governance, Leadership, Operations				
Standards, Curriculum, Assessment				
Instruction, Data-Driven Decision Making, Professional Development				
Culture, Climate, Family/Community Involvement				
Student Support				
Transitions to Adulthood				

TOOL 3.3B: SQR TEAM SELECTION: SCHOOL TEAM FOR SELF ASSESSMENT

Directions

After reviewing the **School Assessment Tool**, use this chart to identify people to conduct the self-assessment. Consider internal staff, community partners, board or advisory members, students, and parents.

Area	Staff and Students with Knowledge/Expertise	School Partners with Knowledge and Expertise (e.g., Parents, Board Members, CBO Partners)
Mission/Vision		
Outreach, Recruitment, Orientation		
Governance, Leadership, Operations		
Standards, Curriculum, Assessment		
Instruction, Data-Driven Decision Making, Professional Development		
Culture, Climate, Family/Community Involvement		
Student Support		
Transitions to Adulthood		

TOOL 3.3C: SQR TEAM SELECTION: EXTERNAL REVIEW TEAM

External review teams should be led by individuals with both the expertise to conduct a review of schools serving off-track/out-of-school youth and the authority to enact recommendations.

The team may be made up of the following:

- Staff from other alternative schools
- Local school-system staff from relevant departments (i.e., curriculum and instruction, student support, English Language Learning, special education)
- Community leaders with interest in off-track/out-of-school youth
- Staff from a local education fund, school-development organization, or educational-reform organization
- Higher education partners

Directions

Use the chart below to ensure that your team collectively can address the areas studied in the review.

Area	Potential Team Members
Mission/Vision	
Outreach, Recruitment, Orientation	
Governance, Leadership, Operations	
Standards, Curriculum, Assessment	
Instruction, Data-Driven Decision Making, Professional Development	
Culture, Climate, Family/Community Involvement	
Student Support	
Transitions to Adulthood	

TOOL 3.3D: CONDUCTING A SELF-STUDY**Directions**

Use this checklist to make sure you take the necessary steps to conduct a self-study.

- Communicate with all staff, students, and parents about the purpose and time line for the self-study and overall review process.
- Determine who on staff will be primary organizer(s) for self-study.
- Assemble a team to conduct the self-study, using **Tool 3.3B** and **Tool 3.3C**.
- With the team, review the School Quality Assessment tool.
- Identify subgroups, if necessary, to conduct specific portions of the self-study.
- Determine a schedule and time line for dedicated meeting time to facilitate the self-study.
- Conduct the assessment and come to consensus on ratings for all areas.
- Communicate findings from self-study to school community.
- Use **Tool 3.3E** to develop a plan for the external review.

TOOL 3.3E: CONVEYING A SCHOOL'S WORK**Directions**

Use Chart 1 to determine what materials, interviews, and classroom visits will best convey the school's work. Examples are included to guide your thinking. Chart 2 gives a sample schedule for the visit; you can use this as a starting point for developing a schedule that suits your needs.

Chart 1: Understanding a School			
Area	What Visitors Should See	What Artifacts Visitors Should Review	Who Visitors Need to Talk To
Mission/Vision		(e.g., school schedule and staffing patterns)	(e.g., school leader, board members, students)
Outreach, Recruitment, Orientation		(e.g., outreach and recruitment materials, intake forms)	(e.g., intake staff, students)
Governance, Leadership, Operations	(e.g., board meeting)		(e.g., school leader, board members, staff)
Standards, Curriculum, Assessment	(e.g., core-content classrooms)	(e.g., curriculum guides, lesson plans across content areas, assessment tools)	(e.g., teachers, students)

TOOL 3.3E: CONVEYING A SCHOOL'S WORK (CONT.)

Chart 1: Understanding a School (cont.)			
Area	What Visitors Should See	What Artifacts Visitors Should Review	Who Visitors Need to Talk To
Instruction, Data-driven Decision Making, Professional Development		(e.g., school schedule and staffing patterns)	
Culture, Climate, Family/Community Involvement			(e.g., parents, community partners)
Student Support		(e.g., school schedule and staffing patterns)	(e.g., students)
Transitions to Adulthood	(e.g., college/career counseling sessions, advisory meetings)	(e.g., individual postsecondary transition plans)	(e.g., postsecondary and business partners)

TOOL 3.3E: CONVEYING A SCHOOL'S WORK (CONT.)

This schedule assumes that team members have reviewed the **School Quality Review Assessment Tool** and have been assigned to subgroups to complete specific sections of the tool before the visit. The schedule is designed so that members of the team do different activities depending on their subgroup assignment (e.g., team members completing section on Student Support meet with student-support staff). The schedule also assumes that the leader of the SQR will complete a formal written report for both the school and the district.

Chart 2: Sample Schedule for a School Quality Review		
Day 1		
Time	Activity - Group A	Activity - Group B
8:00 am	Welcome from school leaders, overview of school, walk-through of agenda, walk-through of school portfolio (all team members)	
8:30 am	Classroom visits	Meeting with school recruitment staff
9:30 am	Subgroup work on Assessment Tool	Classroom visits
10:30 am	Student roundtable	Classroom visits
11:30 am	Portfolio review/note taking	Portfolio review/note taking
12:00 pm	Lunch/note taking	Lunch/note taking
12:30 pm	Classroom visits	Interview with school leader
1:30 pm	Meeting with CBO and other school partners	Classroom visits
2:30 pm	Parent roundtable	Teacher roundtable
3:30 pm	Portfolio review/note taking	Portfolio review/note taking
4:00 pm	Adjourn	Adjourn

TOOL 3.3E: CONVEYING A SCHOOL'S WORK (CONT.)

Chart 2: Sample Schedule for a School Quality Review (Cont.)		
Day 2		
Time	Activity - Group A	Activity - Group B
8:00 am	Roundtable with school leader(s)	
9:00 am	Subgroup work on Assessment Tool	Meeting with school recruitment staff
9:30 am	Student roundtable	Classroom visits
10:30 am	Classroom visits	Classroom visits
11:30 am	Subgroup work on Assessment Tool	Portfolio review/note taking
12:30 pm	Lunch/Meeting of team to complete tool: subgroups complete work and share with full team; team consolidates major findings and recommendations for school and for system/policy	
2:30 pm	Meeting with school staff to debrief visit and present initial findings, gain feedback on findings and process	
4:00 pm	Adjourn	

TOOL 3.3F: DEVELOPING A FINAL REPORT**Directions**

The external review team can use or adapt the chart below to develop recommendations for the school and for the district, separating out those that are within the control of the school and those that are systemic or policy recommendations. The tool can also be adapted for use by a school or network of schools that is using the SQR process for self-assessment to summarize findings and develop a plan for improvement.

Area	Commendations: What the school does especially well	Concerns: Within control of school	Concerns: Outside control of school	Recommendations for the school	Systemic or policy recommendations
Mission/Vision					
Outreach, Recruitment, Orientation					
Governance, Leadership, Operations					
Standards, Curriculum, Assessment					
Instruction, Data-driven Decision Making, Professional Development					
Culture, Climate, Family/ Community Involvement					
Student Support					
Transitions to Adulthood					

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